

6.

estive
took a
their
they
gas for
their

alf to
every
only a
apted
to the
e into
i with
r and

at we
4, the
ect, in
ed by
monly
Chris-
know-
istian

over-
ll, but
ch are
n 1766
there
d of a
r echo
oles in

tancon
e that
ons as
ilver-
point.
b, was
sharp
by the
l. He
shop
se was
to cut
crying
ne sum
t even
farther

fraced
ay was
s, that
year.
about
nd the
eas: of
om the
s name
rn and
e time
he old
accom-
re also
b, and
ations
her's,
what
to be a
y ubol
e Jews,
gyptian
and it
gnated
colour,
on and
y days
om to
priest,
Lord,
it may
servants
of the

spence
oe.

print,

oe, post
cloth,

TON OF

MADE-

Strand,
KINDRA,

THE

LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1210.—VOL. XLVII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JULY 10, 1886.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[“WHAT’S THE MEANING OF THIS?” CRIED THE STRANGER, EYING THE BRUTE DETERMINEDLY.]

THE GARDENER’S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT six miles from one of the most fashionable towns in the West of England there stands a large, straggling old house known by the name of Daneford Place—or called for short by the people in the neighbourhood, simply “The Place”—being the most imposing structure of the kind within a very considerable radius.

It is situated in a hollow, with the ground sloping towards it on all sides, but especially from the back, where a steep hill, covered with woods, towers high above it, and shelters it thoroughly from the north wind.

The Place consists of a square centre block, with imposing portico and two long wings; in colour it is pale buff, streaked with many marks of its weather. The windows are all tightly shuttered up, and the avenues, which meet before the granite steps, are plentifully covered with moss and grass. Altogether, the house and its surroundings have a forlorn and desolate look. And no wonder, seeing that it is

fully fifteen years since smoke has ascended from those flat stacks of chimneys, since the windows were opened, and since the blistered, paintless hall door stood wide—and then it was to give egress to a corpse.

Since the death of Mr. Darvall the place has been deserted. Attempts to let it have been vain.

It was much too large; besides, it has a bad name. Ill deeds done under its roof, have taken away its once honourable character; and many people would not cross the Park after dark for a hundred pounds (for both the Park and The Place are said to be haunted).

The lodges are occupied by caretakers, who see that the house does not absolutely fall to pieces; and in the west and most important entrance dwells a gardener, who leases the gardens and greenhouses at so much per annum, and was the head gardener at “The Place” in the days of old Mr. Darvall.

The lodge he lives in is of a castellated shape, double storied, and covered with ivy; a trim little garden of roses and geraniums, is enclosed in front of it by a green wire fence; boxes of flowers adorn each window-sill.

The master’s trade may be easily guessed from the outside of the house, but the fairest flower he possesses is his only child, his daughter, Mary Meadows. She is seventeen years of age, tall and slim, and not merely pretty, with the blue eyes, ruddy cheeks, and wavy locks of a country maiden. She had an air of such destination about the carriage of her head, such delicate modelling of face and feature, that she promises to be a beauty of a type that is seldom seen among girls of her class in life. In no way does she resemble her mother—with her turn-up nose and sharp, little brown eyes—still less is she like the worthy gardener, with his thick, homely features, and reddish grizzled hair. She resembles no one but herself.

The truth may as well be stated here at once. She is not their child! so why should she be like them? They never had but one of their own—a puling little infant that was carried off by croup just seventeen years previously.

Mrs. Meadows and John were inconsolable. They had married late in life; for several years they had been childless, and now the

long wished for infant, who was to have been the prop of their old age, had been suddenly taken from them.

A week after its death, whilst Mrs. Meadows was still bemoaning her hard fate, her husband came home one evening with a small bundle in his arms, and laying it in her lap said, triumphantly,—

"See here, Jessie, what I have brought you!"

"What is it?" she inquired, in a melancholy tone.

"I believe it's nothing less than a baby! I found it in the orchid house, close by the stove, when I was going round; someone must have put it there within the last half-hour. I came out and I looked, and I hollered, but there was not a soul to be seen; and as I could not leave it there all night, I fetched it home to you to see what's to be done with it."

As he spoke, Mrs. Meadows unfastened an old, dark, tartan shawl; and there, with its thumb in its mouth, and a pair of very bright eyes fixed upon her, lay a little girl of about four months' old.

Her heart went out to it on the spot. With a mother's fond partiality she declared it to be the mortal image of the little angel she had lost. That had been a peculiarly ugly, watery-eyed mile; this was one of the most beautiful infants that it was possible to see, with golden rings of flaxen hair, and a skin like wax. Its clothes were neat but plain; round its neck there was a black ribbon, attached to which there depended a curious, old embossed gold ring, but this seemed more as if it were intended for a plaything for the baby than to have any other import.

"If she is claimed well and good," said Mrs. Meadows. "Of course we must do honestly, and give her up; and if we hear nothing we will keep her instead of our own."

To this John Meadows agreed without demur.

The foundling was never sought for. It was identified by the neighbours as the Meadows' own child, and as such was in time christened and brought up.

The worthy gardener and his wife rarely remembered that she was not their own flesh and blood; and when the recollection flashed across them they thrust it away at once.

She was never to know—no one was to know that but just their two selves. And thus Rose grew up to years of discretion—well, if not to years of surprising beauty; and the fame of the gardener's daughter at Danford Place spread as far as the next two parishes.

For a girl of her rank in life she had received a very tolerable education, thanks to the local school; she could write a neat hand, had as good a general idea of history and geography as most young ladies; was a fair arithmetician, and a skilful needlewoman. Her education, as far as it went, was sound and solid, but she knew no language but her own, nor a note of music. Now school was a thing of the past; she stayed at home, helped her mother in the house, and dusted, swept and polished, but from washing pots and the wash-tub she was held exempt!

A great deal of her time was spent with her needle in her hand, and she found a ready sale for her embroidery at a fancy and outfitting shop in the nearest town of Caversham.

On fine evenings she would stroll up to the gardens, and return with her father; or—not seldom—she would wander about the deserted grounds alone.

Other times she would assist her mother at one of her great periodical dustings and cleanings. At "The Place," this function usually lasted a week, and one or two old charwomen were called in on these occasions. Rooms were swept, cobwebs torn down, windows opened, and a few fires lighted.

Rose delighted in these cleanings. Her own tasks accomplished, she would roam from room to room, gazing at the pictures, fingering the

ornaments, sitting on the faded oak chairs, and peeping the house with the children of her imagination.

The great entrance hall, the library, the suite of three drawing-rooms, the squire's room, were all very well each in their own way; but what Mary revelled in were the great state bedrooms upstairs, with their silver-framed, spotted, varnished mirrors and tapestried walls, and immense plumed and curtained couches.

She also liked the arched little passages, queer, abrupt staircases, and mysterious and unexpected doors which abounded on the second and third story.

She, thanks to her mother, knew all the histories of the place; the names of the rooms, the names of the portraits, and had, from years of habit, quite come to look upon the place as her second home.

Lady Mary's dressing-room was her favourite resort; it was a half-circular boudoir, panelled with faded blue and tarnished silver. It was lined with low maple bookshelves, and the walls were covered with water-coloured sketches and small portraits on ivory and larger ones in oil.

Rose knew them all intimately—from the dowager in powder to the cornet who had been killed at Waterloo, and she had her favourites and her aversions too. Her special aversion was a woman with fair skin, a very low body, reddish curls, and cruel-looking green eyes—a very beautiful woman, as far as colouring and form went, but her expression of malignant triumph spoiled all.

It was a comparatively modern picture. The dress was that of fifty years previously—a court costume, lappet and plumes, and on the lady's neck glittered a superb diamond necklace.

Rose hated this portrait; its green eyes seemed to be always following and watching her; and she generally, the first thing she did when she came up to spend a long afternoon in Lady Mary's room, was to march over to "Madame," as was the picture's name, and turn her face to the wall.

A favourite, who was never treated in the like-rude manner, was a head and shoulders sketch of a young officer with dark eyes and a military cloak thrown over his shoulder. This picture had a curious fascination for her, and the more she gazed at that handsome, resolute, but rather sad face, the more she was convinced that the original was the hero of some mysterious, and, doubtless, tragical history!

A large dressing-table, with curious japanned drawers and a spotted circular mirror in a tarnished silver frame, were the only objects from which the room could legitimately claim its title. No chests of drawers, wardrobes, or mirrors were to be seen; only armchairs, little chippendale tables, cabinets, and book-cases.

Drawn up in the least uncomfortable of these chairs, with her feet on the deep window-sill, Mary spent many an hour (a happy hour!) buried in reading volumes of poetry, old romances, and books of the keepsake era.

She read quickly, and was rapidly devouring the library, so to speak. "Rascals," "The Vicar of Wakefield," "The Old English Baron," and other glibly tales of the latter type were eagerly and thoughtfully perused.

"I can't think what takes Mary's fancy, sitting up in Lady Mary's room half her time," grumbled her mother to her coadjutor, Mrs. Spinks. "Dear woman, the moment her task of dusting is done off she goes and shuts herself up there, and I've all the work in the world to get her home to tea."

"Then she knows nothing?" said Mrs. Spinks, with a mysterious jerk of her black bonnet.

"Oh, not a word! and for your life don't let her."

"Not I, my dear. It's a wonder she has not seen the stain on the floor!"

"Oh! she saw that years ago—one time we

had up the carpet. She has seen it twice a year this many a year."

"Well?" in a tone of awestruck inquiry. "Oh! a lie in them cases is no harm, in my opinion. No need to put notions in the girl's head and prevent her setting foot in the house, like half the folks in the county. So when she saw it, and called out, I told her it was just a can of paint that had been spilt three years ago and would not come out."

"Paint, indeed!" ejaculated Mrs. Spinks, in a sepulchral tone.

"Well, it did as well as anything else. Still, you would not have me tell her—what! here she is," as a distant door banged; but after waiting for a moment in silent expectation the two matrons resumed their conversation, speaking with bated breath.

"I hear them talking at the 'Three Moles' are yesterday," said the charwoman; "and some of 'em said the place was going out of Chancery, and that an heir had been found in Australia!"

"Ay! did ye now? Well, I and my man washed no word of it. I'll believe in the heir when I see him."

"It would do a deal of good to the village if the place was open again," continued the other. "Give lots of employment, and many's the hands that's badly in want of work. Wages is low and times is bad."

"To be sure, to be sure," interrupted Mrs. Meadows, rather faintly. "But how can there be an heir when Mr. Godfrey was never heard of this seventeen year? He's dead for sure, and he, after the mother, was the last of the family—the good old family."

"Faith 'twas odd enough," Mrs. Meadows said, "but I never knew it was good before. What with the former Darvalls gambling and drinking and shooting in duels, and the last man turning out, and cursing his son—not to speak of other things—the loss said about goodness the better if you was to ask her!"

"Oh! well, we have all our faults," returned Mrs. Meadows, who did not wish to hear any slights put upon the dead and gone Darvalls, in whose family she had been second housemaid for more years than she cared to mention.

She was by no means in her first youth when honest John Meadows offered his heart, his hand, and a share of the West Lodge.

"Some people's faults does be nothing to others; those Darvalls were a bye-word. It would be no harm if they did die out," persisted Mrs. Spinks.

"They are dead, sure enough; there's no doubt about it," returned Mrs. Meadows, with decision. "You know the belief they have in the family about a picture?"

"Yes, that picture in the dining-room of the man on the white horse. They say it falls down just before a Darvall dies, but I mindoubt it."

"Then you need not, it's as true as true. It fell the day before the old lady died. She was found dead in her chair, her knitting in her hand; it fell before the master died, and we found it on the floor some fifteen years back; and that, in my opinion, was for Mr. Godfrey."

"If it was my picture I'd burn it in the kitchen fire," said Mrs. Spinks, decidedly; "that would put an end to its warnings once for all."

"Hush—ah!" cried her companion, in a terrified whisper. "Don't say such things, tain't lucky. There's queer things about us that we cannot account for," she added, nervously, looking over her shoulder with a pallid face.

"Oh, queer enough!" agreed the other. "There's a curse on the place or I'm mistaken; and that minds me to tell you that 'Humpty' is about again. He was met in the long wood last week."

"Mercy! You don't tell me so? I thought there was an end of all that! What in the world brings the like of him round?"

"I suppose it's the chance of people living

here again that brings him up," returned Mrs. Spinks, with horrible significance.

"Aye! but I see no chance whatever o' that. Where would they come from?"

"From Australia! It's not denied that a cousin of old Mr. Darvall went there, having got into trouble; and these are some of his people that are now putting in for the place."

"They have to prove themselves first," said Mrs. Meadows.

"Oh, aye! I'll warrant the lawyers will see to all that. Well, now I think this room's about done, and we may be going home. I've got that lot of dust in me mouth I'd be all the better for a cup o' tea."

"Well, we will just call Mary, then, and go," returned Mrs. Meadows, taking off a huge apron and removing a towel that she wore carefully pinned over her head. "I've had just about enough of the place for to-night, and to-morrow will finish it for this spell."

Exit the two old women.

CHAPTER II.

ANOTHER day's sweeping and dusting brought the labours of Meadames Spinks and Meadows to an end, greatly to Mary's sorrow, for she had just commenced Sir Walter Scott's novels, and did not know how to tear herself away from Lady Mary's dressing-room.

It was the month of July, the evenings were long, and time hung heavily on her hands. Her daily household tasks over, her sewing finished for the day, she would walk up to "The Place," and whilst her father went round the green houses, she would go longingly round the house.

At length she found courage to confide to her mother her intense desire to read some of the books in the dressing-room. "Reading" implied study to worthy Mrs. Meadows; the girl was steady, industrious, and obedient—no, gadabout. Why should she not have this pleasure, if pleasure it was?

It was far from Mrs. Meadows' own ideal, reading books all alone up in that ghostly old house, but since Mary knew nothing there was no harm done. And, "Yes, Mary might go. But mind you, Mary, you are to be ready at whatever hour your father calls for you; he will come into the hall and give a shout up the stairs, and don't keep him waiting, whatever you do. You can go up whenever you have the tea things washed; and mind to care of the books, and take none of them away with you."

Delighted with this permission, that very evening, armed with the keys, Mary set forth. Fears of any kind were foreign to her nature; she had been born with a naturally stout heart.

She entered the gloomy, silent hall, ascended the stairs, tripped along the corridor, and entered with a song on her lips.

She had a sweet but uncultivated voice, which was often to be heard about the West Lodge as she went about her work.

She lost no time in reaching down "Ivanhoe," pulling up a chair, and seating herself near the window with her back well-turned towards the obnoxious portrait of "Madame."

Just as she was almost breathlessly reading the account of the tournament, and was leagues away in mind from every place but "Ashby de la Zouche," she was somewhat rudely brought back to her present surroundings by the door behind her being flung open so violently and so suddenly that it made her start and drop her book, and her heart began to beat as it had never beaten in its life. And why? She could not have told the reason if she had been asked. It was the unexpectedness of the thing, the loud noise coming in the midst of such solemn silence.

With all Mary's courage, it was fully two minutes ere she ventured to look round, and then she did so very slowly and very cautiously. There was nothing whatever to be seen, nothing at all.

She rose and advanced and looked out upon

the corridor; all was empty, all was silent; apparently there was not a soul in the house but herself.

She waited and listened, then closed the door and went back to her place, trying to tell herself that it was the wind; but where could the wind come from on a sultry summer's evening?

After a little time she resumed her book, and never took her eyes and her thoughts away from it till she heard her father's gruff voice in the hall below, calling out—

"Mary! Mary! Are you ready? Come along, my book worm!"

As she walked home beside him, over the mossy weed-covered avenue, she felt half tempted to relate her recent experience in the dressing-room; but in the end she was ashamed. Her father would laugh to hear of her being frightened just because a door suddenly opened of itself, as all doors sometimes do.

"Mother is often talking of the story of 'The Place, father, what is the story?' she inquired, abruptly. "I don't mean of hundreds of years ago, and about Oliver Cromwell, but of what you remember—what happened in your time?"

"Oh, I only remember old Mr. Darvall's leap; he lived in a couple of rooms, himself and a queer secretary, and they were always making experiments with chemicals, and twice they nearly blew up the house. He was half crazy with this nonsense, and with pride too; and the old lady had a companion, and her work and her charities, but she never held up her head since Mr. Godfrey was turned out. No, never."

"Was that the son?"

"Yes. He and his father had a desperate quarrel, and the old man drove him out of the place and cursed him, and he was never seen no more. He was a fine, high-spirited gentleman, and we were all main sorry," and John shook his head solemnly.

"Well, and after that?"

"After that the old lady drooped and drooped, and died. She was found dead in her chair one day, and then the old man was not long after her. At her end he was rather weak in the head and used to cry like a child, and call for Mr. Godfrey; but Mr. Godfrey was never heard of again, and there was not a single relation to follow the hearse. There's Darvall's they now say in Australia, but there was not one in England; and there was a hunt for Mr. Godfrey, and the estate was put in Chancery; and only for this talk of a claim now it would not be long before it would lapse to the Crown, and there would be an end of it."

"And is that the whole story?" cried Mary, disappointed. "I thought from what mother said there was a—"

"It's enough for you, my dear," interrupted her father; "the rest is best buried and forgotten; and forgotten I'm thinking it is; and, any way, it's no concern of yours or mine. Old Mr. Darvall was a terrible hard old man, and drove his family nearly mad with his tyranny and his tempers. I'm sure Mr. Godfrey would gladly have changed places with me, and been the son of an honest tradesman, and his own master. Well, here we are! Is supper ready, mother?" to Mrs. Meadows, in the doorway.

Undaunted by her previous experience, and drawn by the magnet of Sir Walter Scott, Mary returned to her haunt the next evening, and read undisturbed—read for a week without any interruption—and had almost forgotten the episode of the open door, when the same curious incident occurred again. This time the door seemed to be nearly swung off its hinges, and this time Mary quickly jumped to her feet, and turned about.

There was no one to be seen; it was getting dusk. She had been holding her book close to the window-pane as it was, and straining her eyes, and looking hard at the open doorway she could see nothing.

She put away her novel, took up her sun-

bonnet, and went and looked out on the corridor.

It was dusk—the light dusk of a summer's evening—down stairs nothing; she descended slowly, and stood in the hall in some uncertainty.

She was half afraid, and yet she was ashamed to go out to the garden and tell her father that she dared not stay in the house alone.

Standing irresolutely thus she noticed a gleam of candle light coming from under the door of the library, and took heart at once. Her mother had been talking of taking some bronze ornaments home, and giving them a rare good polishing at her leisure, for it was Mrs. Meadows' pride and pleasure to keep the furniture, &c., as if it was her own.

"No matter who owns it, or if it don't belong to no one, I'll do my duty all the same, and not be ashamed if the Queen herself was to ask to look over the house," was her constant boast.

"Of course it's mother," said Mary, boldly entering the long dining-room, which in turn opened on the library, and the library into a little room that had been Mr. Darvall's sanctum, where he kept his business papers, where he wrote furious letters to his son, his lawyer, and his tenants, at a large brass bureau that stood against the wall, and filled up a very respectable portion of the room.

Mary's light foot fell on the Turkey carpets was not audible, and she came up to the door of the little room, fully expecting to see her mother, and stood on the threshold and looked in.

She saw a lighted candle standing on the bureau and a man sitting in front of it, ransacking the drawers with both hands; another man was standing up looking at a paper very closely, and reading out names.

Mary stood on the threshold and stared at them in speechless astonishment.

"Have you got the certificate of Fred Darvall's marriage?" said the man who was standing up, in a gruff voice.

"Yes, this is it," holding up a long strip of paper.

"Aye; and now have you got old John Darvall's will?"

"Yes," returned the other, promptly.

"And have you got all Fred's letters?"

"Yes, I believe so," holding out a packet.

"Then that's about all. We've done a good evening's work, and we may as well come away."

At this the man before the bureau rose, closed and locked the drawers, shut the lid down, and, putting the papers in his pockets, took up the candle and prepared to depart.

As he approached the door, followed by his companion, Mary crept to one side, and sheltered herself behind the great heavy curtains of the library as they passed by; they passed so closely that she could have touched them with her hand.

One was a tall man, with a stoop; the other was stout and broad-shouldered.

She could not see their faces, for the tall man cautiously shaded the candle with his hand, and they walked, as it were, by stealth.

Mary shrank closer and closer to the shutter and held her breath as they went by, and passed into the dining-room, thence into the hall.

She waited till she heard them cross the stone flags, and saw that the candle had been suddenly blown out.

There was no light in the room now, save that of the moon, which shone in at the tops of the shutters, which were only partially closed; by this light she saw a small oblong white object on the floor, it looked like a newspaper folded up.

She stooped down and took it in her hand, and saw that it was some law paper, that had evidently been dropped by the recent visitors.

She felt no desire to run after them, she heard them now descending the steps of the portico; she did not wish to take it home. She had some idea of leaving it on the table, and

escaping, when, to her horror, a voice beside her said, in a whisper,—
"Give it to me!"

Hearing this unexpected request she turned abruptly round, but could see nothing; vainly her eyes tried to pierce the dense shadows of that large room.

With a violent effort she flung the parchment from her into the furthest corner, and then raced into the hall, from the hall to the steps and the sweep, literally breathless with terror.

Although but a moment or two had elapsed since their departure, there was not a sign of the two strangers to be seen, not a solitary figure broke the monotony of the great green park; it was as if they had dissolved into air.

Mary, with her knees literally knocking together, once more ascended the steps, hurriedly alarmed and looked the great entrance-door, and then fled home.

Her premature arrival, and her pale, distracted appearance, filled her mother with dismay, and Meadows himself coming in at the same time they cross-examined her eagerly, almost in the same breath. Curious that they should both ask the identical question,—

"Did you see anything?"

"Yes," she stammered, "I did."

"Where? In the dressing-room?"

"No, down below, in the little study off the library. I saw a light under the door, and I made sure it was you, mother, coming after those bronzes, and I peeped in quietly—"

"Yes. Go on, girl!"

"And I saw two men at the bureau with papers."

"Old?"

"Yes, oldish, I think. They passed quite close to me to where I was hid behind the curtain, and one of them dropped a paper, and when they had gone I picked it up, and, just as I was thinking what to do with it, a voice whispered, all of a sudden, 'Give it to me,' and I looked and could see no one, so I just flung it anywhere and ran away as hard as ever I could."

"Ah, dear me! Well, well! It's a strange house. There used to be queer tales, but I never saw naught myself," said John, buttering a hunk of bread. "Say nothing about it to anyone, Mary, you will only get laughed at, or blamed for making too free with the place. You won't be for reading so much in the dressing-room now, I'm thinking."

"No! never! Never again! I don't care if I never see the inside of the place as long as I live!" she returned, emphatically.

And she kept her word. The remainder of "Ivanhoe" remained unread, and, at the next monthly cleaning she begged to be excused her share of the performance, and chose to stay at home and undertake the family dinner in preference to dusting and polishing at "The Place."

Not very long afterwards she went in to Caversham to dispose of her fancy-work, and make some purchases.

Caversham is reached by "bus" from her part of the world, and is a large white town, lying in a hollow—a town of very genteel aspect, with a huge border of villas, mansions, terraces, "gardens," &c., and a town notorious for its respectability and, to a certain extent, fashion.

On this particular day it was unusually lively; the elections were going on.

Had Mary, the benighted country girl, known of this, she would have postponed her visit, but John Meadows never saw, or cared to see, a newspaper that was not a week old, so she had no warning.

It was only when she got to the Mall at Caversham and saw the big placards, and the carriages dashing hither and thither, with blue and yellow rosettes at the horses' heads, and vast crowds of eager shouting partisans, that she was aware that there was anything unusual going on in Caversham.

If she could only gain Miss Tatting's shop

she would be safe. She really felt very much dismayed as she tried to edge her way along, and actually terrified as a big, brutal-looking man in a thunder-and-lightning suit of checks, and a rakish-looking hat, came along beside her, saying, with a hideous leer,—

"Don't be in a hurry, darling, I'll look after you. Take my arm and come along, and I'll see you through it."

Mary pretended not to have heard him, and hastened her pace still more.

"No, no. Now, where's the good of this, my beauty? You come with me and don't be so shy. We'll go into the 'Golden Fleece' and drink success to the yellow colours, eh? and we'll have a snack, and I'll escort you up to the rooms and we will hear the speeches, you may as well come. Why not? I suppose your mother knows you're out?"

"Please to leave me alone, and mind your own business," she answered, between her chattering teeth.

"Oh, a pretty girl is always my business." Reaching out his arm he drew her towards him.

She struggled, and screamed, and finally broke away, and darted down a long alley, her tipsy persecutor in full pursuit. In the *maître* she had lost her hat, her little cape had been torn from her shoulders; she felt her knees failing her—her pursuer was within arm's length when a deliverer appeared. A man came suddenly out of a side door, coolly put out his foot and tripped up her follower, who lay sprawling like a lobster on his hands and knees in the road.

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded the stranger, eyeing the brute determinedly.

For all answer Mary Meadows staggered up against the wall and burst into tears.

"She's my young woman!" cried the other, rising with curses, "and I'm only 'aving a bit of a lark. Don't you go interfering in other folks business, or it will be worse for you," he continued, with a scowl. "Come on, Fanny, never mind that bloke."

"I—I—never saw him before in my life," she gasped. "Oh! sir, please send him away. Please do?" she entreated, with a fresh burst of tears.

"Here, come inside," said the gentleman, pushing back the door which opened into a long, old-fashioned garden at the rear of a row of tall houses.

Mary lost not a second in accepting the invitation, and the next moment the door was slammed and locked, and her would-be escort was left alone, roaring vengeance in the lane.

Mary's new acquaintance was undoubtedly a gentleman, young and good-looking, and well dressed. He stood before her in some doubt for a second, and then he said,—

"Tell me what I can do for you? How did it happen?"

"I—I—did not know it was the elections, and I came in to town and got mixed into the crowd, and could not get out again, and then that man followed me, and I lost my hat, and he tore off my cape, and then I ran away."

Her companion looked at her intently, as she stood before him in her simple cotton gown, with the eye of a critical connoisseur.

It is not only that she is so very pretty, but there is something of high-bred refinement in the turn of her small brown head, and long throat; he noted her pure, creamy skin, and her well-shaped, taper hands, tanned though they be by sun and wind, do not escape his eyes. She looks a lady to the very tips of those dainty fingers, but her accent betrays her looks; ladies do not go abroad alone on election days. He is puzzled to, as it were, classify her.

"I am obliged to be at the committee-rooms at once," he said, hurriedly taking out his watch, "but I will take you inside, and my uncle's old housekeeper will look after you, and we will send you home safely. May I ask where you live?"

"I live near Dansford Place," she answered, simply.

"And strange to say I come from that part of the world also. My uncle is Eliot of Cansgort."

Cansgort was a fine property about two miles from Dansford Place; the woods of either ran side by side, though the houses were far apart.

"How odd that we have never met! I generally spend my leave down there, and I don't think I've ever seen you."

Mary coloured violently. Was she likely to meet a person of Mr. Eliot's position; she who lived in the gate lodge at The Place. He was surely making fun of her.

"I am going in to speak to Mrs. Steele, the housekeeper," he said, abruptly, leaving her momentarily alone.

He did not choose to appear with his unexpected guest without having had a preliminary interview with the greatest old gossip in Caversham. In a few hurried sentences he told his tale, put a bank-note into Mrs. Steele's hands, saying as he did so,—

"Rig her out in a hat and all that sort of thing. Find out where she lives, and if I'm not back by six o'clock hire a fly and take her home. She is in the garden. Come on and take her in charge, and offer her lunch and everything that's proper."

And sure enough there in the garden she discovered a very nice-looking young lady—yes, and dropped a curtsy to her as such. A young lady in a plain blue bird's-eye cotton and black silk tie, but minus what she would call her "walking things," and with her hair and collar considerably tumbled, and traces of tears on her face.

At first Mrs. Steele treated her young charge with great distinction, took her up to the best bedroom, brought her hot water and towels, and waited on her with the deepest solicitude.

Then she offered her wine or tea, and, needless to add, her guest was in favour of the latter.

After this she thought she would fail in her duty if she did not discover who the young lady was—where she came from.

A few pointed questions revealed the appalling fact that the young woman to whom she had called "miss" was nothing more or less than a paltry gardener's daughter.

"Your father the gardener at Dansford Place?" she cried, with a crimson face.

"Why, bless my heart, if I ever heard the likes of this!" and she seated herself with a plunge in the nearest arm-chair, and surveyed her visitor with angry amazement.

"Why, for what did you take me? Who did you think I was?" inquired Mary, rather aghast.

"Who did I think you were? I took you for a lady born and bred, to be sure!"

"Me!" cried Mary, becoming crimson in her turn.

"Yes, you. Well, I'll never boast again! Think of Susan Steele, as has seen the might and best of quality, being took in like that! Deary, deary me! I know your father well, and I remember your mother, though it's years since I saw her—a plain-favoured body, too. In the name of fortune will ye tell me where ye got your good looks?" she demanded, forcibly.

Mary shook her head hopelessly, and made no reply.

"Mr. Maxwell was took in too," she continued, peevishly. "Why, he drew me aside, and gave me five pounds, and said I was to get you a proper hat, and that. Yes, and he said for the young lady, not the girl, or the young person. It beats all, that it do! I never was so fooled before; not that it's your fault."

Rising and coming over to the tray she poured herself out a cup of tea, and sat down before Mary, evidently resolved to recoup herself at once for her recent mistake.

The tea had a soothing influence, and she poured out three or four cups, cooled them, and drank them from the saucer, meanwhile conversing more and more confidentially with her *vis-à-vis*, whom she submitted to a close

examination about her parents, her prospects, her age, education, and admirers.

"Don't tell me you are seventeen past, and not a fellow after you. Maybe you are grand in yourself?"

"Maybe I am, Mrs. Steele," reddening, and recollecting Farmer Jones's son, who had offered to walk with her on Sundays, and who she had snubbed, and the civilities of the guard of the "bus," which she had likewise quenched.

"Mr. Eliot of Cangort is a queer man, isn't he?" said Mary, in her turn.

"Aye. He is Captain Eliot's uncle, and unmarried. The Captain is his heir. Mr. Eliot is old and selfish, and will never marry. He's a different person altogether from Mr. Max, as we call the Captain; he likes ladies, and balls, and hunting, and going about the world—just the opposite of the other, who is very strict and severe. All the same, they are main good friends. It's a pity there's no lady at Cangort; it's as bad as if it was shut up—like Daneford Place. By the way, did you ever go over the house?"

"Oh, yes; often."

"Only by day, I expect, then," said Mrs. Steele, significantly.

"Oh, I've been there pretty late, too."

"And what did you see? I know you saw something. I can tell by your face. You can't deceive Susan Steele!"

"I would rather not talk about it, Mrs. Steele, if you please."

"You need not mind me, since I know the whole story, for my mother was still-room maid—aye, a matter of sixty years ago now. She was there when it all happened, and I know the story as well as you do yourself."

"But I don't know it at all, Mrs. Steele. I've never heard anything excepting that old Mr. Darvall drove his only son out of the house and disinherited him, and was sorry for it when he was dying."

"Oh! that's nothing at all. What I mean is what happened fifty years ago in Lady Mary's dressing-room. Would you like to hear it?"

"Yes, I should, very much indeed," returned Rose, with unconcealed eagerness. "Nothing could interest me more."

"Well, I'll just pour myself out another cup, and then I'll begin, for it's dry work talking."

Having swallowed her fifth cup of tea, cleared her throat three times, she commenced the following history.

CHAPTER III.

"You must know, of course, that for the last three generations there has always been one of the Darvall family lost or missing. I suppose you know that, at any rate?" said Mrs. Steele, impressively, nodding her head at Mary Meadows.

"No, I never heard of it till now," returned the girl, humbly. "Of course I know there's Mr. Godfrey—"

"Yes," interrupted the housekeeper. "As before him, his father's brother Frederick, and before him—well, that brings us just to about fifty years back, when the first one went—well, astray, and never was heard of no more."

"Mr. Darvall of that day was a real, grand gentleman to drink and hunt, and kept a house full of company. He married a French lady, and had two sons, Robert and Claude; Claude, you know, is a French name."

"Mrs. Darvall was very gay, and filled the house with company, and such fiddling, and singing, and dancing as never, never was seen!"

"However, one cold morning she died, and her niece came over from Paris, and kept house for the old master and the two young men, by all accounts."

"She was a most beautiful woman, and as wicked as she could walk. Her maid, a French girl, told queer stories to my mother, of lovers, and letters, and duels."

"She had been married to an old man, and he was dead, and she had heaps of debts, for the old husband left all he could to his own people."

"She could do as she liked with the Squire here. She wore the family diamonds, and many a fine silk purse full of golden guineas she got out of him, and many a debt he paid."

"The two young men were just her slaves. She followed the fox-hounds in a scarlet habit, and she went to all the balls in the country for twenty miles round, dressed like a duchess."

"She drove in a coach-and-four, as grand as if she was the Queen. She had as many lovers as would line the avenue, from the gate to the hall door, and she played one off against the other in beautiful style. They say she could have married half the gentlemen in the county if she had liked."

"These were grand times at The Place when she was mistress. The poor old master was given up to his port-wine latterly, and cared for nothing else, and she managed him and his sons exactly as she pleased. There were hunt breakfasts, and dinners, and dances, and routs of all sorts—mostly gentlemen at them. The big, grand ladies began to be rather shy of Madame, and only a few that were no great shakes used to come, but there were men in plenty!"

"After a while it was given out that she was going to marry her cousin Claude—the eldest son—and everyone was surprised, for he was very quiet, and kept himself in the background rather, and he was a good five years or more younger than Madame, though she was so beautiful, somehow, her age was no matter at all."

"Well, they were married, and went off to France for a bit, and then came and settled down altogether at The Place. The old man was weak in the head now, and the living was quieter—no more big junketings."

"Madame used to have people to stay with her. One especially, a French chap, with a handsome, wicked face that Mr. Claude could not abide, but Madame set great store by him; he rode with her, walked with her, sang songs, and spent hours up in the blue boudoir with her, and more than once my mother swore she saw him kiss her. Mr. Claude was quiet, but he was jealous; and at last he forbid this Count the house, and there was a great scene one day—Madame shrieking and screaming, Mr. Claude cursing and shouting, and he was heard to order the Count out of the house on the spot, and swear a big oath that if he ever caught him cross the threshold again he should never pass it alive."

"Well, the Count went away, and things were desperately dull. Madame sulked in her room for weeks, and wrote dozens of letters, and got them too. Then she cheered up a bit when Mr. Claude was elected for the county, and had to go up to his seat in Parliament."

"Madame got him in, people said. She drove about here and there, and talked to her people, and bewitched them till they did not know what they were saying. She gave bribes, she gave kisses for votes—her very heart was set on getting her husband into parliament, so she said—and he got in, too!—and he and she seemed to a kind of make friends over it, and he wanted to take her up to town, he said, and show her off at Court, and present her to the king, but Madame would not stir a step. She said her place was with her aged uncle, his father, and she resigned her pleasure and her inclination to her duty."

"A pretty duty! Scarcely had she kissed her husband, and seen him off for town when the French Count arrived, smiling and sleek, and took up his quarters as before. There was no one in the house but Madame, the old master, Madame's maid and companion, and the Count. Of course there was plenty of servants in the servants' hall. Madame no more cared for servants than if they were statues and deaf and dumb."

(To be continued.)

TROUBLE EVERYWHERE.

There's trouble in the dwelling,
Trouble on the street;
There's trouble in the bosom
Of every one we meet;
Morning, noon and midnight
There's trouble in the air;
And, oh! there's no denying
There's trouble everywhere.

There's trouble in the garden;
Beside the sweetest rose,
Beside the fairest lily.
The thorn of trouble grows;
There's trouble on the ocean;
There's trouble on the land;
And when the sunshine's brightest
There's trouble close at hand.

From troubles that pursue us
We never can escape;
They're sure to overtake us
In some peculiar shape;
To circle slowly round us,
Or seize us, unawares;
Trouble's sure to find us, for
There's trouble everywhere.

But after storms of trouble,
How blessed is the calm!
And after wounds of warfare,
How soothing is the balm!
And when from tribulations
Our spirits have release,
If but for one brief moment,
We know the joy of peace.

So trouble has its mission,
As through the world it goes,
A message unto mortals
In every breeze that blows;
It moves the stagnant waters;
It stirs the pulse of health;
Gives courage to the hero;
To every labourer wealth.

'Tis trouble that incites us
To brave and daring deeds;
'Tis trouble that prepares us
To feel another's needs;
Each heart must bear its burden
Of suffering and care;
For man is born to trouble,
And he finds it—everywhere.

J.P.

IVA'S QUEST.

—10—

CHAPTER XX.

DR. GORDON started.

He was a clever man, aye, and a successful one. London rang with his praises; all people spoke well of him.

He was looked upon as though his decisions were infallible, and so, perhaps, he was hardly to be blamed if he had learned to place enormous confidence in his own judgment. He had told Lady Ducie he did not believe in ghosts—had declared to her there must be a natural explanation of the mysterious sounds heard in the picture-gallery; and yet when Sir Ducie declared the ballad he had listened to to have been the favourite song of his lost wife, for an instant the shrewd man of the world felt baffled.

His thoughts flew back to a time when he had not been so successful—when he had had leisure to study the problems of science, and to read the opinions of others.

Looking at Iva Ducie's haggard, anxious face, noticing how suspense had worried him despite his strong partisanship for my lady, the physician felt a thrill of pity.

"I wish I could help you," he cried, heartily. "I wish I had the power to set your mind at rest."

Iva shook his head.

"I must go to the Chase—I must search the west wing for myself."

Dr. Gordon threw up his hands.

"My dear sir," he said, haughtily, "I never saw Lady Ducie before to-day. I am a complete stranger to all the incidents that have taken place in the family the last twelve months. You cannot surely suspect me of conniving at a deception?"

"Nothing was farther from my thoughts."

"Then take my word—the word of a man whose truth has never yet been doubted—you would find nothing to satisfy you in the west wing of Netherton Chase. I searched every room myself, and I am convinced no human creature could be hidden there."

Iva shook his head.

"You cannot understand," passing one hand across his forehead. "I feel she is alive. Why else should I dream of her night after night? Why else should all my visions picture her at Netherton?"

Gordon turned to his old friend.

"You must rouse him from this stupor; it is nothing but a mental delusion. It may become madness if indulged in."

"I share it," said the doctor, coolly.

"You?"

"Even I!"

"But what grounds have you for such a notion?"

"I had none until to-day. Pardon me, Gordon, but your own story has given them to me!"

"How?"

"You say that nothing will induce Lady Ducie to leave the Chase; believe me, unless some guilty secret kept her there she would be thankful to fly from the place where she has suffered so much."

Dr. Gordon frowned.

"Supposing some 'guilty secret,' as you phrase it, be indeed hidden at the Chase, how do you propose to find it out?"

"I can form no plan."

"Then I will help you. Remember, I have no suspicions of Lady Ducie. I hold her guiltless in word and deed, but I cannot look on such misery as Mr. Ducie's without doing my utmost to assuage it. Lady Ducie has commissioned me to send her a nurse. It so happens I have a sister who has a passion for nursing. She is not like ordinary women. If I tell her how much depends upon her acceptance, I know she will tend the little lord as willingly as she superintends the wards of a hospital. I have already told his mother a person of education and refinement would suit her much better under her present circumstances than an ordinary servant. By to-morrow evening my sister shall be installed Netherton Chase."

"But how is that to help us?"

"Lady Ducie kindly showed me over the house. There is a garden staircase communicating with one of the rooms in the west wing. Gertrude shall undertake that the approach to this is left open; you, Mr. Ducie, can make your way by it to the picture-gallery. You may hear, or you may not, the sounds that have so perplexed me, but you will at least be able to set your mind at rest as to any mystery existing at the Chase."

Iva wrung his hand.

"And I actually thought you among my enemies. Dr. Gordon, how can I thank you?"

"By accepting this proof as decisive. If you find your suspicions a mere figment of your brain then dismiss them bravely. Take up your sorrow like a man, and bear your burden instead of sinking under it."

"I will."

Miss Gordon felt bewildered when she heard all that had been undertaken on her behalf.

"It reads like a chapter out of a novel, brother."

The physician sighed.

"I don't know what to hope for, Gertrude. I can't wish to find that Lady Ducie is not the true, generous woman I have believed her; and yet I think if he discovers nothing that poor young fellow will get his death-blow."

"But what can there be to discover?"

Miss Gordon was nearer fifty than forty; she had no fine young lady nervousness; the doctor could speak plainly to her as to a second self.

"Gertrude, the more I think of it the more certain I am that there is something wrong."

"Not supernatural?"

"That voice must come from somewhere."

A strange thought flashed through his sister's brain, too strange, though, for her to credit it.

"Is the Chase an old house?"

"Centuries old; it dates from the time of the Plantagenets. Rumour has it King Henry the Sixth was hidden there for a week during the conflict between York and Lancaster."

"Ah!"

"What are you thinking of?"

"I hardly like to tell you."

"We have shared many secrets, Gertrude."

"I will tell you this when I return from Netherton Chase; and now, dear, I really must pack up if I am to be with Lady Ducie when you promised her."

My lady was in close converse with her attendant maid when the telegram announcing Miss Gordon's coming was brought to her.

"You need a friend as much as a nurse, and so I am sending you my sister. You can trust her fully."

Marrables bent over my lady's shoulder to read the missive with scant ceremony.

"That won't suit you at all."

"She won't suspect; he did not."

"She must," returned Marrables, shortly, "unless you are going to add starvation to Miss Gerda's sufferings."

My lady turned on her with keen reproach.

"How dare you!" she cried. "Woman, how dare you speak like that!"

"I reckon you'll have to hear plainer words than mine. It's a thousand pities you interfered to stop the engagement last autumn. Nothing has gone right with you since."

Lady Ducie could not deny it.

"If Gerda and her cousin had been married they would have persuaded my husband to leave them Netherton Chase."

"Not if your son had lived."

"But baby might have been a girl."

Marrables looked at her lady scornfully.

"You made things pretty sure in the will you had read at the funeral. Boy or girl, alive or dead, the baby mattered nothing—the money and the estate were yours, and yours only."

"Lord Ducie had a right to do as he chose with his own—a perfect right."

"You did not think so."

"Woman, what do you mean?"

"The walls are thick," said Marrables, shrewdly; "but this is an old house, and those that try can overhear a good deal they're not meant to do. You were a pretty good hand at that sort of thing yourself once."

The widow's cheek blanched.

"Two can play at that game, my lady," said the maid, innocently. "I know pretty well all you said to Mr. Ward the night you and he were so busy writing in your husband's den!"

My lady's face was ashen. Marrables went on,—

"You were called away all in a hurry, my lady. You tossed the paper you hated into the fire—at least you thought so!"

"Woman!" gasped Lady Ducie, "leave me, and never let me see your face again!"

"You know what that paper was. Listen: it is in my possession, and unless you make it worth my while I shall go to Mr. Ducie and tell him all."

"All!"

"Yes. They say he is a devoted husband; that his every hope lies buried in his wife's grave. My lady, you and I know that grave does not exist."

"The body could not be found," said my

lady, quickly. "It was carried away by the torrent. Everyone thinks so."

"And they may go on thinking so if you to give me two thousand pounds."

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

"Very well; I go to Mr. Ducie."

"Marrables!"

"I fancy he would give more than that for all I have to tell him. He has sworn to find his wife's grave. What if I—"

My lady put up one hand warningly.

"You shall have the money, say, and double that, so that you help me now."

"Four thousand pounds?"

"In bank notes, the day"—my lady hesitated, as though she did not know what words to choose—"the day I can take my child away from here."

"Then you must be quick."

Lady Ducie shivered.

"What can I do? But for that man's sticking himself at my very gate the matter would have been settled weeks ago."

"There is only one thing for it."

"What?"

"Part of the fencing must be pulled down—or, stay, what do you think of the Chestnut walk?"

The listener shuddered.

"Impossible."

"Not in the least."

"The journey must be by carriage. I tell you the walk is impossible!"

"Very well. Tell your Yorkshire man the hedge has grown too thick the side of the park nearest Yaxley. Hire a brougham from Yaxley-junction, and the thing is done."

"The servants?"

"Give them a holiday."

"And Miss Gordon?"

"Telegraph she is not to come. No, stay, that might arouse suspicion. Let her come, and make her so uncomfortable she refuses of her own accord to stay with you."

"She is a lady, Marrables!"

"All the more easy to get rid of her. Them fine lady misses are always scared."

"And you will be true to me, Marrables?"

"I will be true to the four thousand pounds, my lady. I suppose you can trust Mr. Ward? He won't dare to say anything, I reckon, since he'd have to blacken himself to accuse you."

There was no carriage from the Chase to meet Miss Gordon. A tall, aristocratic-looking man stood on the platform. He knew by instinct who the quiet, pleasant-looking gentleman was, and went up to her.

"Miss Gordon, I think. I am Iva Ducie."

She took his hand. Woman-like, she could have cried over his sad, depressed young face.

"I know that you will help me. Dr. Gordon has told you my story."

"I will help you as much as I can, but you know I shall be at Lady Ducie's disposal. I may not be able to write to you."

"Don't write," said Iva, gravely. "I know the door perfectly. I can leap the wall of the Park at some lonely point, and make my way to it. I shall be at the spot every night at seven. I know you will manage it as soon as you can."

"Indeed I will."

"Your brother thinks me mad, I fear, or, at least, hopelessly deluded."

"He is very much perplexed himself."

"Miss Gordon, you will not fail me?"

"Indeed, no."

"And if you can find out anything for me do. One thing more—don't trust Lady Ducie. She is false to the core."

Gertrude hired a fly, and drove to the Chase. Lady Ducie received her with frigid civility.

"I fear your brother has deceived you, Miss Gordon. I wanted a nurse for my child, not a companion for myself."

"I am a nurse," returned the other, calmly, "and as I have had great experience in hospitals, and understand all infantile ailments, my brother thought you might like my assistance."

which would spare you needing the advice of the local doctor. But we will only consider the arrangement temporary, Lady Ducie. I will leave you in a week's time if you have found anyone to replace me."

Julia flushed.

"I fear I have seemed rude, but I have led such a lonely life since my husband's death, it will seem strange to me to have a companion."

"You do not need to have one. I shall be glad to make the nursery my sitting-room. Now may I see the little boy?"

"One moment. Did your brother tell you about—the west wing?"

"Yes."

"And you are not afraid?"

"I think I am too old for foolish fears. I own I am bewildered by my brother's account. Some day, my lady, perhaps you will allow me to see the apartments in this disused wing."

And then the conversation dropped.

The baby took to Miss Gordon if his mother did not, and when she had seen the ease and comfort the stranger's tendance gave her boy Julia repeated her coldness, and was most attentive to the new nurse.

Miss Gordon took all her meals with her hostess, and for many an hour beside the two women were together in the nursery; but one thing perplexed the nurse—my lady always absented herself after every meal. She would remain at the table after Miss Gordon, and yet join her in the nursery from quite a different direction to the dining-room.

"Baby is not like you," said Miss Gordon, when she had been three days at the Chase, and was in despair at not having been able to keep her promise to poor Iva. "Does he take after his papa?"

"You shall judge for yourself, that is, if you are not afraid to walk round the picture-gallery, because it is in the west wing."

"I am not afraid at all."

So they went through the green baize door, and Gertrude noticed the key that opened it was a very ordinary one in appearance, just like that of her own trunk. My lady pointed out the various rooms and their beauties, showed the postern staircase, and then turned into the picture-gallery.

They stood before Lord Ducie's portrait, but there was no singer to day, nothing broke the awful silence of the place. In spite of herself Gertrude felt awestruck, and was glad to come away.

"I have a bad headache," she said to Lady Ducie, at dinner that evening; "would you mind my leaving baby to Phoebe? I will walk about the corridors, and then I shall be quite myself, and able to attend to him at night."

"Phoebe is quite at your service. I should think a nap would do you good; you look so tired."

"A nap is the best thing—thanks!"

She was free. My lady lingered at the table. Gertrude went upstairs, and inserted her own key into the green baize door. She opened it easily, and closing it carefully behind her went on towards the postern staircase, and unfastened the bolts. She lost her way once or twice in returning, and met with delay in consequence. Suddenly she heard footsteps approaching. Her heart beat wildly; a strange fear oppressed her. She had just presence of mind to retreat inside one of the deserted rooms, whence she could look out upon the passage; herself unseen.

The moments seemed hours to her, and still the footsteps came nearer and nearer. She gave one glance, and then her heart gave a sudden leap. The promenade was Lady Ducie, and she carried a small tray spread with an invalid's repast.

Gertrude Gordon always said afterwards it came to her as though by inspiration that there must be a secret chamber in the west wing, and someone was concealed there.

She trembled so much she could hardly move, but she forced herself to go on. Just

as she expected, my lady turned into the picture-gallery, and disappeared. It seemed to the nurse a panel in the wall close by her husband's picture slid back and admitted her. Gertrude's one thought now was of Iva Ducie. She turned to the head of the postern staircase just as he was mounting it.

"At last," she said, in a whisper. "I could not manage it before. I hope you did not think me faithless."

"I trusted you; but, oh! the heart-sickness of the delay. It seemed an eternity to me each night when I returned disappointed till I could set forth again."

She put one hand on his arm.

"Have you any brandy?"

It was the strangest question. He smiled faintly.

"It is singular you should ask. I have seemed so weak lately Dr. Sturgis has made me carry a flask in my pocket whenever I went out."

"Have you it now?"

"Yes," producing it.

"Drink some—half, and save the rest."

Iva looked terrified.

"Have you had news for me?"

"Drink the brandy. I have news, but I know not whether it is good or bad."

He obeyed her.

"Now tell me."

"You have known the Chase a long time?"

"On the contrary, I have paid but one visit here, and that of only two days."

Her face fell.

"But you have heard the history of the place?"

"Often."

"I believe there is a secret room somewhere in this wing."

He started.

"What makes you think so?"

"I have just watched Lady Ducie. She did not see me. She was carrying a tray with wine and jelly. She seemed to disappear."

Iva caught her hand in a viselike clasp.

"You are sure?"

"Perfectly."

"Then it is as I thought—they are keeping her shut up there! Miss Gordon, you are a woman—you have a tender, generous heart; you will stand by me and help me to save her."

The old maid never hesitated.

"If your wife is here, Mr. Ducie, I will be as faithful to her as though she were my sister."

"Come," said Iva, fiercely, "come, we are losing precious time. Think what she may be suffering while we are dawdling here."

On and on in perfect silence, until they came to the spot where Bertram, Lord Ducie, seemed to look down on them approvingly from his gilded frame.

"It was here."

"Just there—the wall seemed to roll back and let her enter!"

Iva put his hand over the surface. He noticed just beyond the picture was a round mark not larger than a pea. He put his finger on it, but nothing followed.

"Look!" said the nurse, "put your other finger here."

"Here" was another mark similar to the first at about a foot's distance. Iva put a hand on either of the marks and pressed with all his might. At last he found the spring. It acted as if by magic. A small door opened in the wall, disclosing a narrow passage. The two conspirators passed through, when it closed upon them.

"Where are we?"

"I don't know, only I feel we are on the track. You are not frightened?"

"No; how dark it is."

He struck a match, and by its light saw a door facing them, and opened it. Another moment, and the strangely assorted couple found themselves in a small room, whose whitewashed walls and scanty furniture con-

trasted bitterly with the luxuries common to the other apartments at the Chase.

A woman's piercing shriek rang through the air, but neither Gertrude nor Iva paid any attention at that moment. They forgot Lady Ducie—they had only eyes for a fair, slight figure stretched on a narrow pallet-bed.

Iva's heart seemed to stand still with anguish. It was his darling. He had found her, but surely only in time to see her die!

Gerda looked white and fragile as a fair garden lily, her golden hair, cut short, waved in glittering rings on her forehead. It was a beautiful picture, yet terrible to one who loved her, for her eyes were bright with a feverish brilliancy; every vein showed through her transparent skin, and she was so thin that her clothes hung on her wasted frame. She alone betrayed no surprise. She looked at her husband-lover with undying affection in her sweet, sad smile.

"It is nearly over, my darling, you will forgive me now. I never meant to harm you, dear."

The nurse bent forward. As for Iva he was sobbing like a child. She took Gerda's hand and kissed the fair face.

"My child, there has been a cruel mistake. Mr. Ducie returned to England in March to hear you had mysteriously disappeared. His whole life since that has been spent in a feverish quest for you."

Gerda smiled.

"Isn't it true, then?"

Iva's arms were wound round her, now his cheek pressed closed to hers.

"Is what true, my own?"

She did not answer him. She seemed to give herself up for one moment to the perfect rapture of that embrace. As to Lady Ducie she had vanished. No one missed her.

The nurse dived into Iva's pocket as coolly as though it was her own, took out his flask of brandy, and poured it down Gerda's throat. The cordial seemed to revive her.

"My dear," said the good woman, kindly, "try and tell us how you came here."

It was a very simple story they gathered from her broken words. After she discovered, through Mr. Ward's brutality, the stain upon her birth, she had mourned bitterly that Iva should have been allowed to marry her in ignorance of her origin. Lady Ducie, who played the part of tender friend and comforter, had whispered to her that if she so willed it he need never know. The marriage, so said my lady, was illegal because performed in a name to which the bride had no claim. If Gerda, indeed, wished her lover to be free she had to submit to her stepmother's guidance. When Iva returned from his voyage he would hear she was dead, the world would lie before him, his life unruined by the error he had so unwittingly made. Gerda was young, she loved Iva better than herself; she knew if he were told the truth he would insist upon the marriage being repeated, would think of her happiness and honour before his own future—she yielded to Lady Ducie's representations for Iva's sake.

My lady, having worked on the girl's generous spirit to sacrifice herself, the rest was easy.

She had learned from her husband the existence of the secret room, and was easily able to convey Gerda thither.

She did not treat her prisoner unkindly; indeed, she showed her more pity and care than might have been expected of her; but, false to the core, she deceived Gerda cruelly by telling her Iva was faithless; that on the report of her death he was already wooing another bride.

She tortured the gentle spirit by such slanders as these, she found a hundred pretexts for delaying her departure from the Chase; and so in those sweet spring days the captive grew weaker and weaker, until it seemed likely death would come to my lady's aid by accomplishing her victim's release.

The story was piteous in its simplicity and pathos. On that bright May evening new strength seemed given to Gerda.

With her husband's arms about her she could almost forget the blow Laurence Ward had hurled against her.

Almost—not quite—now as Iva kissed her, and implored her to get strong for his sake, the recollection came back in all its poignancy.

"You forget," she whispered; "you can't know what I am. Perhaps they have not told you."

"I know all, Gerda."

"All!"

"Aye, sweetheart; it was my lady's greeting to me."

"And it is true."

He passed one hand caressingly over her head.

"Your name is Gerda Ducie now. Does it matter to you very much, my darling, whether you were born so?"

"But that marriage was not legal. She told me so. My name was not Ducie, and—"

"The marriage was as legal as though it had been solemnised with royal pomp. Gerda, that woman has been a fiend in human shape. To me she pretended never to have heard of our marriage, while all the while she was persuading you the marriage itself was illegal. My darling, can you trust anyone who has played such a double part?"

"I never trusted her."

"Then—"

"But I wanted you to be free, and—"

"And I will take no freedom that separates me from you."

Her eyes met his. She saw the depth of tenderness written on his face, and a strange, sweet smile hovered on her lips.

"If only it wasn't wrong!"

"Wrong!" cried poor Iva, almost desperate. "Why, Gerda, what can there be wrong in love like ours, hallowed by marriage?"

She flushed.

"You know it might get abroad—the secret of my birth I mean—and then the disgrace would be reflected upon you."

"Let it."

"Mr. Ward knows it"—again that vivid blush—"and he is very pitiless. He would not keep our secret."

"My wife, how shall I make you believe me? If the whole world knew it I should not care; if the stones of the street shouted out 'Gerda is Lord Ducie's nameless child' it would not matter to me so only that I could reply, 'She is my wife!'"

Gertrude Gordon thought Iva would prevail best alone, so she went softly out of the little prison-like room.

There was no difficulty in finding the door on this side. It stood quite open and unhidden.

For a moment the nurse marvelled Gerda had never effected her escape. Then she remembered not only was the girl too weak to leave her room, but she had been persuaded in her divine unselfishness not only to suffer this concealment, but to desire it for love's dear sake.

Miss Gordon went down the grand staircase wondering she saw nothing of Lady Ducie. At its foot she met a muffled figure looking anxiously about.

The doctor's sister was no coward. She put one hand on the woman's arm.

"If you are in Lady Ducie's plot for hiding her stepdaughter you had better know that all is discovered. Gerda Ducie is now in her husband's arms."

Marrables started.

"And my lady?"

"It is doubtful as yet whether Lady Ducie will be delivered up to justice; but I warn you she can never again make it worth your while to sin for her."

The words conveyed an impression their speaker never dreamed of. Marrables be-

lieved Lady Ducie's theft of her husband's will had been discovered.

Farewell now to her dreams of four thousand pounds of hush-money! Power had changed hands. Now it only remained to make the best terms for herself.

"I always warned my lady good never came of robbing the orphan. Time after time I begged her to do Miss Gerda justice."

It dawned on the nurse slowly they were at cross-purposes, but she said not a word to correct Marrables' mistake.

"Gerda Ducie will have full justice now," she answered, gravely, "for her husband is strong to fight her battles."

"I should like to see him."

"Who?"

"Mr. Ducie."

"He cannot leave his wife."

"I reckon he'd leave her if he knew it. Look here, I don't know your name, ma'am, but I fancy you're in the Ducie secrets."

"I am."

"You know, then, there's one secret Miss Gerda and her husband 'ld give a good deal to hide."

"I know to what you allude."

"There is but one person they need fear—Laurence Ward, the lawyer; they'll never get him to hold his tongue, not if they went on their knees to him, but I could."

"What influence do you possess over him?"

"That's my secret."

Gertrude looked at her sharply.

"And you are disposed to sell it?"

"A word from me would place him in the felon's dock—a word from me, and he'd be disgraced for all time."

"I see, and for a consideration you are disposed to sell the secret?"

"I'm a poor woman, and I'm not going to give anything for nothing."

"That I believe."

"Give me five hundred pounds," said Marrables, sharply, "and I promise not a creature shall ever learn there is a bar sinister on Gerda Ducie's 'scutcheon.'"

Miss Gordon hesitated.

"I will send Mr. Ducie to you."

She found Gerda peacefully asleep. With difficulty she prevailed on her husband to leave her.

"For your wife's sake, still more for that of the children who may come to you, conciliate this woman."

"You think she is in earnest?"

"I think for five hundred pounds you can purchase Laurence Ward's silence as to Gerda's history for ever."

"I don't mind the money," said Iva, slowly, "but I hate to think of rewarding that wretched maid. If you knew the torture she has caused me."

"For your wife's sake," pleaded Gertrude. "In your generosity you may forget the story of her birth. Believe me, she never could."

He went into the hall and confronted the woman he had distrusted from the first moment of seeing her.

"Five hundred pounds," she said, in answer to his question. "Five hundred pounds, and you shall have what places Lady Ducie and Mr. Ward for ever in your power."

"And that is—?"

She lowered her voice:

"The true will of the late Lord Ducie."

He started.

"Do you mean he made a later will than the one believed to be his last?"

"You might call it so to soften the truth to the world. As it happens he never made but the one will, which has been in my possession ever since I rescued it from the grate where my lady had tossed it, thinking the flames would destroy the proof of her sin."

"And the will that was acted upon?"

"A very skilful forgery, for which two people are answerable—my lady and Mr. Ward. I can prove it, Mr. Ducie, for I saw them at their task and can swear to it. I have

a paper at home on which they practised the different signatures. Oh, I can bring their guilt home."

"Five hundred pounds," muttered Iva. "Woman, I would rather throw the money into the sea than pay it to you, but for my wife's sake I accept your offer. The cheque shall be sent to-morrow morning. Now leave me."

A piercing shriek rang through the house. The waiting-maid rushed to the door.

"My lady!" she cried, "something has happened. It is her voice."

Another moment, and Lady Ducie rushed into the room, her child in her arms, and to Iva's horror its white robe was in flames. How it happened no one rightly knew.

A small fire was burning in the nursery, for nights were chilly. Whether a lighted cinder fell out and reached the babe in his cradle, whether his mother in her hurried preparations (it was discovered she was getting ready for instant flight) held him too near a candle, none could say.

The thin cambric blazed furiously, my lady lost her head, and, instead of attempting to put out the flames, carried the child down the stairs through a current of air.

Horrified, Iva caught up a heavy table-cover and wrapped it round both mother and child, but the fire had got too great a start for it to avail.

Marrables dashed into the kitchen and returned with a huge bucket of water, which she poured over them.

Iva heard the babe's faint moaning cease. He called to the rough kitchen-maid, and sent her to Lime Cottage for Nurse Brown and the trusty servant who waited on him. Whatever happened they would be of use. The girl was to go on later for Dr. Sturgis.

This done, Iva left Lady Ducie and her child in Marrables' care, and went back to his wife.

He seemed to have been with her only a few moments, though in reality it was some hours, when Dr. Sturgis came quietly in. With deep feeling the old man pressed his lips to Gerda's brow.

"You are alive, after all! Thank Heaven for that! We shall yet have you among us, the happy mistress of Netherton Chase."

Iva looked at the good doctor as though he had gone mad.

"It is quite true. That poor little baby lord is dead. You are Baron Ducie of the Chase, and by your kinsman's first will, which I have just seen, master of Netherton and its broad acres."

It was even so. Staunchly as he had kept the secret of her birth, at the last Bertram could not bring himself to leave the Chase to Gerda.

He made what he thought a just will, for he gave his daughter a portion of a hundred thousand pounds, and he left his estate to the son he was expecting, with the proviso that if Lady Ducie's child proved a girl Netherton should go with the title.

He had not been unjust to his second wife. He left her a thousand a-year for life, to revert to her daughter after her, should she have one.

If she bore a son the estate was charged with an allowance for her until he came of age. If she were childless she still enjoyed the income of a thousand a-year for her life.

The shocking death of the baby lord, the finding of his father's last will (for it was always so described; very few people ever knew the document proved at Doctors' Commons had been a forgery), and the discovery of the missing Gerda, were a nine days' wonder at Netherton.

The truth never got abroad. The version popularly believed was that the stepmother, furious at the news of Gerda's marriage, had hidden her away, hoping to make her husband believe her dead. The other crimes committed by Lord Ducie's widow were never noised abroad.

The little child was buried with all the pomp and ceremony befitting his rank, and then his mother and the waiting-woman disappeared.

We use the word advisedly, for none of the good people at Netherton were made aware of their intention, except Lord Ducie.

He knew they were bound to a distant American port in company with that clever lawyer, Mr. Ward, for whose abrupt departure all his clients mourned.

Iva never had to remit the widow's jointure; he never had to dread her keeping her promised silence, for the vessel by which the three who had worked him so much misery never reached America. It went down in the Atlantic with every soul on board.

When the bright summer days were at their longest Sir James Pierrepont and his wife returned to the Hall, to find affairs at the Chase very hopeful and peaceful.

Gerda, now Lady Ducie, was still an invalid, but Dr. Sturgis had little doubt that happiness and freedom from all care would in time bring back her old bloom.

In the meanwhile she was kept in the utmost retirement, and even Lady Pierrepont was not permitted to enter the sick room, over which the hospital nurse, Gertrude Gordon, kept jealous guard.

But when the July roses flowered, and my lady grew indignant at the restriction, it was removed.

Lord Ducie himself drove over to invite her to visit his wife; and when she reached the Chase she hardly knew which to admire most—the sweet, delicate features of her old favourite, or the rosy, week-old baby, who was exhibited to her by Iva with all a father's pride in his first-born.

Surgeon Adams had not been allowed to serve as "father" at the wedding, because he offered himself months after that event had been consummated; but the good ship being in Southampton Water for a week's repose, he came down to Netherton in time to figure as a sponsor at the young heir's christening.

Sir James and Lady Pierrepont were the other god-parents.

Dr. Sturgis, Gertrude Gordon, and her brother are solemnly bespoken for the next time such duties are required, and will not be likely to forget their promise, as all three take no ordinary interest in the Ducies.

There are very few changes at the Chase. Iva caused the secret chamber to be pulled down—that is, the two walls which divided it from the next room.

The secret spring still remains, and so whoever inhabits the blue room (that being the name given to the enlarged apartment) has the privilege of a private entrance to the picture-gallery.

The clouds which surrounded Gerda's future have happily rolled away, and very bright and fair looks our heroine's lot.

She has not forgotten her mother's sorrowful story, but she has no morbid feeling about the facts of her birth.

She knows that even if they were noised abroad, and the whole world heard the tale, she would still be her husband's dearest treasure, for his love has never changed—never even wavered—but is just as warm and strong as when, on a bleak March day, he heard the story of a mysterious disappearance, and resolved to devote his life to Iva's quest!

[THE END.]

Be avaricious of time; do not give any moment without receiving it in value; only allow the hours to go from you with as much regret as you give to your gold; do not allow a single day to pass without increasing the treasure of your knowledge and virtue. The use of time is a debt we contract from birth, and it should only be paid with the interest that our life has accumulated.

A SECRET SIN.

—O—

CHAPTER XIII.

"Oh, Bernard can take care of himself!" Pera said, with such an air of indifference that Captain Valentine was puzzled.

"And so can Vyvyan. He would be disgusted with any one who said he couldn't," pulling his moustache thoughtfully as he studied her troubled face.

"But don't you see?" twisting about her pocket-handkerchief nervously till the delicate lace was reduced to holes, "Mr. Le Mesurier may go on talking against him behind his back, and Mr. Vyvyan will never know?"

"Le Mesurier's a brute and deserves a kicking; but Vyvyan's the luckiest man alive."

"Why?" looking up at him in surprise.

"Can't you guess?" looking down into her eyes with a jealous flash in his own.

"Happy, when someone is trying to spread the grossest slander that ever was?"

"Happy," he persisted, "when Miss Clifford thinks it worth while to get quite excited about him."

A deep, overpowering blush spread over her neck, and cheek, and brow, and she bent her head to hide it, longing to run away.

"Shouldn't I have done the same for any one else?" she said, almost fiercely. "I hate injustice."

"So do I," he said, coolly; "but I always hate it most when a special friend is concerned."

Pera bit her lip.

"There is no question of a special friend."

"Glad to hear it."

"But he is your friend, and you will do your best for him," distracted between her dread of being supposed to be attached to Vyvyan, and her burning desire to save him from harm.

"He was my friend five minutes ago, but I'm not quite sure now."

"You are not going to desert him?" her eyes opening wide under their long lashes.

"Not unless you make me."

"You know I shouldn't do that."

"You are doing your best. The more you entreat me not to, the more likely I am to do it."

"You are joking," twirling her fan impatiently.

"Never was further from it in my life."

"Then please explain."

"Is it necessary? Can't you guess that you've been making me frantically jealous during the last five minutes?"

"Oh, is that all?" with a little laugh of relief.

"You call that nothing? Believe me it's a very unpleasant sensation."

"Then I wouldn't have it."

"How can I help it?" raising his eyebrows.

"Will you promise to take the same amount of interest in me if I get in a hole?"

"Oh, certainly, if I happen to hear of it. I am going home directly."

"But your home, I've been told, is not the other end of the earth. I don't mean to lose sight of you just because you vanish to the other side of Warburton."

"But—but we live so quietly. Papa never invites anyone to the house."

"Then I won't wait for an invitation," with his usual audacity. "I'll come as a tourist to see the ruins."

"Ah, so you may; anyone can do that."

"And if I go to the wrong door, and ring at the Gatehouse instead, will you promise to be my guide?"

Pera thought of her father, and hesitated.

"Perhaps Mr. Anthony Graves's friend would object?" watching her narrowly.

She started.

"You mustn't call him that. He mayn't know him at all."

"But I thought you said your cousin did?" looking surprised.

"He had a letter from him. That's all I know."

"When was that?"

"On the morning of the fourth."

"Are you sure of the date?" with sudden interest.

"Yes, quite sure."

"Would she ever forget that night of horror and doubt, even if she lived to the age of Methuselah?"

"But perhaps you had better not mention it," she added, as she remembered Bernard Vansittart's snatching the scrap of paper from her hand, and his strange, mysterious manner.

"Not mention it?" opening his eyes. "But don't you see the importance of it? Graves disappeared on the third, and this letter received on the fourth, might throw some light on his movements. For Vyvyan's sake, I would give anything to know where he was that night."

Was it the wind that moved the window curtain, or a hand that clutched it nervously? They were both too much engrossed to notice it, but the curtain shook persistently, and yet there was so little air that even the wax lights remained steady.

For Vyvyan's sake! How the words spurred her on to remember the smallest detail! Bernard mightn't like it, but she didn't mean to keep back anything that could benefit Bertie Vyvyan if it were told.

She fancied herself once more at her window in the turret, startled from her sleep by the noise of voices in the garden below. Again she saw the two forms crossing the slope of grass, one of which she had taken for Bertie himself. Then followed the quarrel. And soon they were out of sight, Vansittart clutching the other man by the arm.

"He couldn't have come to the Gatehouse," she said, after a pause.

"Do you think he did?" in surprise.

"I looked out of my window and saw somebody. I can't think who it could have been."

"Was he alone?"

"No, with Bernard Vansittart."

"Mr. Vansittart is your cousin?"

"Yes."

"About what time was this?"

"About two or three in the morning."

"The best way would be to ask your cousin, wouldn't it?"

"He never likes being asked questions; and perhaps this was a secret, and I oughtn't to have told you," remembering again Bernard's extraordinary conduct when she found him standing by the dungeon.

"I won't breathe a word of it if you don't wish it; but I think Mr. Vansittart ought to be applied to."

"I will write and ask him about it to-morrow, and if he snubs me I needn't care."

"Certainly not. Send him about his business at once if he doesn't behave properly."

"I shall have to send you about your business if you don't take care," said Lady Hargreave, approaching with a smile. "You've engrossed Pera more than half the evening."

"We've been talking business of grave importance."

"Of course, you always do."

"Auntie, you must be tired. Let me play instead of you," said Pera, anxiously.

"No, my dear, you are to dance; but with some one else than Val," smiling, as she turned away.

"Miss Clifford, don't listen to her. My dear old friend has become barbaric."

"She is quite right, but I'm too tired to do anything but sit still," subsiding on to the sofa.

"So am I," placing himself by her side.

"Don't feel as if I could crawl."

"Miss Clifford, may I have the honour?"

and Major Protheroe bowed low.

"So sorry, but I'm too tired," looking limp and exhausted.

The Major expostulated, but Pera didn't

care much about him, and really had spoken the truth when she pleaded fatigue. So he walked away to find another partner, internally vowing vengeance against his junior officer, Captain Valentine, who seemed to be master of the situation whether dancing or sitting still.

Only a few minutes later, and Vyvyan, having screwed himself up to the point of imagining that he would be wanting in good manners if he failed to ask the lady of the house to dance, stood before his poor, lost love; and half shy, yet half defiant, asked if she would give him that waltz.

She hesitated, feeling as if she must say "Yes," even if Major Prothero were offended for life.

Her colour came and went, her breath came in a little gasp; whilst he, blind as a bat as to her real feelings, thought she was attempting to manufacture an excuse, and was stung to the quick just as she got out stammeringly,—

"I'm so sorry, but I've said I was too tired." He bowed stiffly, muttered, "Of course you are engaged. I was a fool to ask you," and walked off with his head in the air.

Eva Haughton dropped her fan right in front of him. It looked like an accident, but nothing was ever more intentional. He picked it up, and returned it, intending to take a solitary walk in the garden; but she remarked with a sigh, "I'm nearly suffocated for want of a breath of fresh air," and what could he do but offer his arm?

They went out slowly, with none of the eagerness which characterizes lovers' steps when longing for a *tête-à-tête*; but Pera, watching jealously, felt the last hope die in her heart. They had gone out under the stars, what for but to pledge themselves to each other for better or worse? She was as sure of it as if Bertie himself had told her; and yet she felt that it might have been prevented, if only she had not sent him away angry and disappointed.

Eva Haughton, the only child of Sir John and Lady Haughton, knew as well as possible that her father and mother would be infuriated by a serious flirtation with a detrimental. But she was madly in love with the good-looking Lancer, and she could not give him up, though prudence told her she must, and conscience whispered that she was doing wrong. She was impulsive and unscrupulous, but she was not mercenary, and Vyvyan's comparative poverty was no obstacle in her eyes. She knew instinctively that he loved Pera Clifford, Lady Hargreave's apparently suddenly acquired niece; but the knowledge only spurred her on, jealousy goading her almost beyond the bounds of self-respect.

Silently they walked together under the trees, Vyvyan lost in a most unflattering reverie.

Eva felt vexed and annoyed at his manner, and tried a topic which she knew would rouse him.

"I really think 'the butterfly' of the regiment is caught at last."

"That has been said scores of times; but he was always free in a couple of months," a melancholy cadence in his voice.

"But this time anyone can see that he is such a willing captive."

"There is nothing in it," he said, with a confidence that exasperated her. "Miss Clifford is engaged."

"Then I would bet anything that the engagement is broken before the strawberry season is past."

"Women have loose ideas about fidelity," bitterly.

"I beg your pardon," with unnecessary warmth, "a girl is always faithful to the man she loves."

"A girl is supposed to love the man she has promised to marry."

"Supposed to, perhaps; but very often the promise has been wrung from her against her will, or given in haste. Then, if there is no love to fall back upon, the chain galls, and if

it once galls be sure it will be broken before many weeks are past."

"If this is your creed I should pity the fellow who had the honour to be engaged to you!"

"You needn't," with a smile straight up into his face, "for I could be faithful always, in spite of poverty, in spite of opposition at home, in spite of shame—if shame should come upon him. I would stick to him like a bar, and never fail him. Oh! Mr. Vyvyan," with a throb in her voice, "don't you believe me?"

"Yes," bending low over her upturned face. "Your love would be a prize worth winning."

Just as her heart was palpitating with expectation, there was a step on the gravel path, and Mr. Le Mesurier stood before them, his face livid with rage.

CHAPTER XIV.

"LADY HARGREAVE begged me to tell you that your carriage had come," he said, sullenly. "I needn't remind you that the dance you promised me has just passed."

"A thousand pardons; but I forgot to look at my fan before we came out. I had all my partners' names scribbled on the sticks."

"One excuse is as good as any other," as the three walked together towards the house. "I dare say now you owe me a grudge for telling you that the carriage has come. As if it were my fault!"

"I didn't want it," with a little excited laugh. "It seems quite idiotic—to drive home and go to bed, when it is such an exquisite night."

"You said you were tired."

"But I'm not now."

"Very flattering to Vyvyan."

"Perhaps it was the night air," as she blushed rosy red, and drew her hand from Vyvyan's arm slowly, as if she were loth to do it.

It lingered in his as she wished him good-night under the rose-crowned porch; and though there were plenty of men eager to put her in the brougham, her last look was for Vyvyan, and her last thought.

Le Mesurier, who loved her with all the sullen passion of his nature, muttered a curse under his breath. It is not too much to say that at that moment he could have killed Vyvyan without remorse.

"I'll do for you yet," he said to himself, as he looked at the young soldier's handsome face, and knew that Eva Haughton's love was won by its beauty.

Rage and jealousy were burning like two flames in his breast, and the wildest ideas of revenge were flashing through his brain.

Thus Bertie Vyvyan had two enemies, both men who were not likely to spare him if the opportunity came for doing him a mischief, and for those who look for one anxiously and unfettered by scruples, it generally presents itself sooner or later.

But Pera was standing in the doorway with a wistful look in her large dark eyes, and Vyvyan had no thoughts to spare for Le Mesurier.

"Is Valentine ready?" he asked, pretending to be in a fever to go away.

"No," called out a laughing voice from the dining-room. "Lady Hargreave is feeding the starlings."

"That is a hint not to interrupt him," said Pera, with a smile, though her heart was aching so madly. There was something in her manner that struck Vyvyan, and he leant forward on a sudden impulse.

"It is pleasanter in the garden than inside."

Of course she ought to have disregarded the implied invitation, and turned her back with her chin in the air; but she did nothing of the kind. She was very young, and she had given her whole heart to this man. She could not call it back in a hurry, simply because he didn't seem to want it; but she could hide

her love and her loss, and go on with a brave smile, as if she were none the worse for it.

Her poor heart beat like so many drums as they walked side by side under the stars, alone together for the first time since that last night in the ruins. What would be say to her now that the opportunity had come? It was he himself and no other this time. Captain Valentine, was safely engaged in satisfying the cravings of hunger. The other men were probably doing the same. Still the precious moments were flying, and why didn't he speak? She stopped under the arch of roses, where they had found her that afternoon.

"Further on it is too dark; we had better turn back."

"Not so dark as it was in the Castle the last night I saw you at home. Do you remember?"

The question seemed almost an insult. There was no doubt about her remembering. Could she ever forget?

"I remember," she said, quietly. "You promised to come to the woods the next morning, and you pretended that you had to be at parade. It was a sudden change of mind."

"Yes, I changed my mind because of what your cousin told me. He and I very nearly came to blows before we parted." There, "I couldn't put it plainer than that," he thought, to himself. "If the engagement were a fraud she could say so now."

But he forgot that unless you have the clue to its meaning an allusion often fails.

"Did you quarrel about Anthony Graves?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Anthony Graves!" he exclaimed, in intense surprise. "What on earth do you know about him?"

"I know there is some mystery about him, and people say the horriest things—that you are glad to get rid of him."

"Never could be a greater mistake. Poor little chap! he has done me a good turn more often than not."

"I should say so to everyone."

"But why? It's nobody's business except my own."

"They make it their business!" eagerly. "They think everyone is as wicked as themselves. Oh! if you had only stayed at the Gatehouse that night no one could have breathed a word against you!"

"But I didn't do anything dreadful," with a bewildered look. "I simply took a long ride in quite a wrong direction, slept at an inn, and turned up at the barracks late for parade and everything else. Somebody has been taking you in!"

"Did you meet anyone on the road?" her eyes fixed upon his face in her eagerness.

"I really don't know. I wasn't in a mood to care whether the road were a desert or a crowd. Le Mesurier was pestering me about it, but I really couldn't tell for certain if I saw Anthony Graves or not. But," with a sudden change of manner, which made her heart beat fast, "we are wasting time. I mayn't see you alone again for a century!"

They were standing still under the roses, and their delicious fragrance made the air heavy with its sweetness, whilst all around lay the white moonlight on verandah, wide-spreading lawn, and gabled roof, giving a sacred beauty to a scene that was pretty enough by daylight.

Bertie Vyvyan's face was white with intense feeling, and his eyes glowed with passionate longing.

He was no longer master of himself; the love which had been so pent and restrained burst its bonds. He stretched out his hands involuntarily, and his voice was hoarse with passion.

"Pera, tell me why—"

Her face was white as his—her breath came fast—her lips trembled, and she shook like a branch in the wind; but before her hands could go out to meet his—before he could even finish the question, which was

hanging on his lips, and on which his fate depended, the other men came in a noisy band across the lawn—Valentine humming a love-song from *Carmen*, Le Mesurier adding a bass accompaniment in quite a wrong key.

Like two thieves caught in the act, the lovers started apart, and Pera conquering her emotion, stepped out into the moonlight, as if to show that she was rather glad than not to be interrupted.

Valentine, struck by the beauty of the graceful figure, with the roses forming a background, and the moon shining full on the pretty face, ended his love-song with a low bow, which seemed to make the burden of it a tribute to her charms.

He was most forcibly attracted by her, but he had not reached the stage of sighs and feverish unrest.

He could love and laugh and go away without a pang, knowing that there was a chance of meeting, if he chose to contrive it, not only on the morrow but on the five or six succeeding days if she stayed the promised week.

Therefore it was with cheerful serenity that he took his leave, walking back to the house by her side, and preventing any private conversation with Vyvyan, all in an unpremeditated fashion, because he had no idea that he was his rival.

Hadn't Vyvyan disclaimed anything of the kind in the most positive manner? And hadn't he already tumbled head over heels into a hopeless flirtation with Eve Houghton? Le Mesurier evidently thought so, for he was looking as sulky as a disappointed bulldog, and so much the better, for he was a brute.

Valentine was disgusted because he had offered a lift home to Major Ptothero, and he couldn't very well let the other man trudge all the way back on foot, when they had often crammed five into the dogcart.

Lady Hargreave, with her niece by her side, came to the porch to see the tandem start, and went through the usual display of sensitive nerves, when the leader tried to stand on its own hind legs, and whisk the groom who was standing at his head off his only pair.

"Only his play," laughed Val. "I'll soon take it out of him when I get him on the road. Get in, Le Mesurier—plenty of room."

"Thanks. I won't trouble you."

"Nonsense, man. Look sharp. I can't expect the horses to stand for half-an-hour."

"I am going to walk. I like it best," he called out very decidedly.

"Why didn't you say so before?" grumbled Val, who nevertheless was glad to be rid of him. "All right," to the groom.

Williams let go, the horses darted forward, there were shouts of "Good-bye—pleasantest day ever spent," &c., as he scrambled up behind, and Pera, her voice raised so that Vyvyan at least might hear her, said, with hypocritical approbation,—

"Quite right, Mr. Le Mesurier, safety is better than pleasant company."

The colour mounted to his face as he inwardly wondered why this girl to whom he had done no harm, should care to have a hit at him.

"It wasn't want of pluck that kept me back, as you kindly insinuate, but want of exercise."

"Is it want of pluck to look after your own skin? I should do it myself!"

"It's all very well to say that; but, you know, a woman may be as great a coward as she likes, and no shame to her," he said, sullenly.

"I don't agree with you at all. Cowardice, and falsehood, and treachery are just as bad in a woman as in a man."

"You talk as if you had just been meeting with these three great vices," he said, with a slight smile.

Her eyes flashed, her cheeks grew flushed.

"Not quite that; but I happened to overhear one man insinuating the horriest things of another behind his back."

"Ah! eavesdropping was always a woman's

ailing," he answered, with a sneer. "Good-night, Lady Hargreave; I mustn't keep you up any longer."

"You mustn't say that I was eavesdropping or I'll never speak to you again," cried Pera, in hottest wrath.

"It was you said it, not I. I shouldn't have dreamt of it."

"It was an accident. I didn't mean to hear."

"Of course not. Some day, perhaps, you will tell me what you heard, and I shall be able to explain it. Good-night!" he bowed without offering his hand, and she bent her head slightly with the air of an offended queen.

Lady Hargreave shook her head with a look of disapproval.

"My dear, I don't know what you two were talking of, but there is one rule you ought to follow—never make an enemy."

"I hate him!" said Pera, passionately, with a childish stamp of her tiny foot.

"That's very possible," said her aunt, with a yawn, "but you mustn't show it on any account. An enemy is a luxury which few people can afford. However, as the objectionable young man said just now, we'll wait for our explanation. I want to know all about it, but I'm dying to go to bed."

CHAPTER XV.

A few days later Pera was sitting in the drawing-room at Warburton Hall writing a letter to her father, to obtain permission to stay a little longer with her aunt if he were quite sure that he didn't want her.

It was a very pleasant room, furnished with a due regard to comfort as well as taste, with many looking-glasses framed in delicate tinted lace, and hothouse plants grouped gracefully at their base. Large windows opened on to a broad verandah which was completely covered with creepers, and beyond stretched the lawn, smooth as green velvet, with the rosary on the other side, a mass of beautiful blossoms in the height of their perfection.

Pera's pen glided on, and a smile came upon her pretty lips as she thought of her father. Would he be angry or disappointed? Had he begun to miss his little daughter? Her heart felt very soft towards the old place, although she wished to stay in the new. And she could flatter herself that she was doing as much good here as at home, for her aunt said that it made her feel young again to have a young thing about the house, and she had been so kind that Pera was thankful to be able, even in a small way, to make some return.

As she wrote on a little table by the window, her eyes straying from the sheet of paper to the garden where the bees were humming, the butterflies fluttering on their career of conquest and depredation, the birds singing their morning carol of joy, she heard the door open roughly behind her. Looking over her shoulder after a violent start, she was astonished to see Bernard Vansittart coming towards her with an ominous frown on his brow, and an uncanny glitter in his eyes, such as she had found there but once before—on the night of the third of June.

Afraid that something dreadful had happened she jumped up from her seat, and asked eagerly if her father were well.

"I don't know, and I don't care," he said, angrily. "I've not come here to talk twaddle about him or anyone else. I want to know what you mean by betraying my secrets, and doing your best to land me at the gallows?"

"Bernard!" she gasped, in breathless amazement.

"Don't Bernard me," fiercely, "but answer my questions. What do you mean by it?"

"You must be mad!" she said, slowly, her hands on the back of her chair, as if she kept it in front of her as a sort of protection, her eyes fixed gravely on his pallid face.

"I'm not mad, and you can't get out of it that way. What did you know of Anthony Graves? And how dared you link our names together?"

"I meant no harm whatever I did; but I won't be bullied," her anger rising after the first panic had passed.

"Don't talk like a child. Do you know this is a matter of life and death? Do you know that if you had been my bitterest enemy you couldn't have played me a worse trick?"

"I never guessed it. I only said when they were talking about him, that you must know him, because you had a letter from him. If there was any harm in that, I am sorry for it."

"And you think that will satisfy me?"

"I don't know what more you want," drawing up her neck, and feeling inclined to add, "that's all you'll get," but remembering her aunt's injunction in time to keep it back.

"I suppose in case the worst happened, you would think it must be a supreme consolation to remember that you tried. I'm so sorry!"

"What do you mean by 'the worst'?" she asked, angry at his scorn, and really uneasy at his strange words. "Do you know where Mr. Graves is? And have you helped him to hide?"

"What devil possesses you?" he exclaimed, fiercely. "I've never seen the fellow for months. I know nothing about him, I swear I don't."

"Your word would be quite enough. Why are you in such a state of mind about him?"

"I wish the fellow were here, he owes me money, and he's evidently keeping dark in order to shirk paying."

"I thought he was a money-lender. I didn't know those people ever borrowed or got into debt, I fancied it was the other way up," she said, quietly, somehow convinced that he was telling her an untruth.

"Perhaps you don't believe me?"

Pera could not tell a falsehood to save her life, so she evaded a direct answer by asking a question instead.

"Don't be disagreeable; you've done nothing but abuse me. Who was the man who was with you on the night of the third?"

"Vyvyan. He wasn't over civil, and took himself off."

"No, no. After Mr. Vyvyan had left," keeping her eyes fixed upon him, through a sudden instinct.

His face changed; from pale it became actually livid, and his eyes distended as if some ghost had risen before them. He stammered, as he answered, with assumed confidence,—

"Nobody. You are dreaming."

"It was somebody," she persisted; "for I saw him from my window. You were walking together, and then it seemed to me you began to quarrel."

He passed his hand across his forehead with a nervous gesture.

"Never heard such nonsense. Visitors don't usually drop in at two o'clock in the morning."

Pera had not mentioned any hour, and it struck her at once that two o'clock was the exact time at which she had seen the stranger walking by her cousin's side. What could have put it into Vansittart's head, if there had been nothing to mark it?

She felt more and more convinced that he had helped Anthony Graves to disappear, and for Vyvyan's sake she determined to sift the matter to the bottom.

"Casual visitors don't; and it is rather late for an appointment," she said, slowly.

Then he came close up to her, his face still deathly white—with rage or hidden horror.

She constrained herself to stand stock still and face him, whilst inwardly longing to run away, and yet she told herself that this was only "Cousin Bernard," whom she had known from a boy, and she surely couldn't be frightened of him.

"Look here, Pera. Who has put you up



["NOW, DARLING," CRIED BERNARD, "FORGET MY HARSH WORDS. I WAS HALF MAD WHEN I CAME IN!"]

to this?" he asked in a low voice, but every syllable distinctly audible.

She constrained her eyes to meet his, although with an effort.

"Nobody. I saw you and another man with my own eyes. Don't you remember that I followed you?"

He shook his shoulders with a gesture of impatience, which looked very like a shudder.

"I remember," with a frown, as if the remembrance were abhorrent to him, and he would give worlds to shake it off. "But you can't deny that you found me alone?"

"Yes, you were alone then, the man had gone, or you had hidden him. Surely you can trust me, Bernard?"

"No, Delilah, I can't. I call you Delilah, and I mean it," he cried, fiercely. "You want to get rid of me. I'm in your way. You would sell me to-day—this very minute—if the price were Vyvyan's safety." He gripped her shoulder tight, with a nervous clutch. "Listen to me," lowering his voice again, but speaking with terrible earnestness. "There is only one way to muzzle you—a wife can't bear evidence against her husband in criminal cases. Do you understand?"

"No. Take your hand away, you are hurting me," shrinking from him as far as she could.

"I wouldn't hurt you, child, for anything," his face softening. "But I don't like the look of things. What with your blabbing, and the confounded meddling of other people, they might pounce on the wrong man, and not find out their mistake till—the rope had done its work. Look here, child, we've grown up side by side like two plants, in the same garden. I've known you ever since you could toddle. Don't you remember the games we used to play together? You were the Sleeping Beauty, and I was the Prince, or you were Amy Robsart, and I was Leicester. You can't know anyone half so well as me, and

you used to be fond of me, that I could swear."

He released her shoulder, but caught her hands in his, and held them fast, whilst she struggled hard to free herself, absolutely afraid of the passionate glow in his eyes.

"Pera!" his voice rising with the force of his appeal, "I've loved you all my life; you can't throw me over now."

"Oh, hush! I've always been fond of you," trying to pull her hands away with redoubled energy; "indeed, Bernard, I have," with a deprecating smile; "but I've always thought of you as a brother—nothing more, and nothing less."

"A brother!" the intensest scorn ringing out in his tone. "By Heaven, Pera, I'll be more, or that lover of yours shall pay for it. Now, darling!" his voice changing to the utmost tenderness; "forget my harsh words; I was half mad when I came in. I never loved anyone but you, and I must be loved in return. Look at me?" There was such an imploring accent in his voice, that she turned her head.

"It's no use, Bernard; I—," but before she could utter another word his feverish lips were pressed to hers, his arms were cast round her in a passionate embrace.

Then the fierce instinct of insulted maidenhood rose up within her, and she wrenched herself away from him with the exertion of all her strength.

Panting with indignation, she retreated towards the open window, and found herself face to face with Bertie Vyvyan.

The horror of that moment she never forgot.

Of course he mistook the flush of anger for the blush of confusion, and his face was stern as death, as he bowed stiffly.

"Pera, Mr. Vyvyan has come over to tell us—Oh! Bernard, I didn't know you were here!" said Lady Hargreave, as she came slowly under the shade of the verandah with

a parasol in her hand, and caught sight of Vansittart.

Pera scarcely took in what passed after that she only found after a few minutes that Vyvyan was gone, and that her aunt seemed surprised, for she said he had just consented to stay to luncheon.

"Oh! if Bernard hadn't come, what a happy afternoon we might have spent together!" she moaned to herself, as she fled upstairs with her burning cheeks. "And now he'll never speak to me again."

(To be continued.)

HARDLY will you find anyone so bad but he desires the credit of being good.

COMFORTABLE HOUSES.—It is useless to try to do away with the parlour. The ordinary woman clings to the pretty nook which is always in order, where she may enjoy a little music; receive a few calls; a place where certain things that are highly prized may be saved from the wear and tear of everyday use. So, when a young couple begin house-keeping, they need seven or eight rooms at least; for they at once set up a kitchen, laundry, and perhaps a nursery. These, with the prized parlour and necessary sleeping rooms, make up the complement required. No one could favour very small houses who had undertaken to do work in one. Things become worn from the lack of proper places to put them; clothing absorbs the odours of the kitchen; the least article out of place in a small room gives the appearance of disorder, and a little house is productive of a treadmill-kind of existence to the woman in it. Bandbox houses may do for summer residences when there isn't much to do but stay out of doors and take your meals at an hotel; but it is hard to adapt the requirement of a modern home to one of them. "More room" is the desire of nearly all housekeepers.



["WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS MIDNIGHT ASSIGNATION, MADAM! WHAT HAVE YOU TO SAY?"]

NOVELETTE.]

A QUEEN AMONG ROSES.

CHAPTER I.

It was glorious Junetide, queen month of the whole year; the dew was lying in sheets of silver on the velvety lawn, where a table was spread with a snowy cloth, and dainty pale pink cups and saucers; a Queen Anne teapot, quaint, but beautifully chased, gleamed like diamonds between the dishes of crisp water-cresses and delicate rolled bread and butter.

At this sylvan repast sat a middle-aged lady, a slight frown puckering her face, as she gazed towards the gate, fretfully murmuring,—

"What on earth can keep him till this hour? Twice this week it has occurred; he knows I never care to take tea alone."

A thrush in the hazel hedge behind her piped his loudest, as if to attract and please her; the sweet perfume of the roses blended with the clover and hay from the meadows at her right; but her eyes wore a hard expression not pleasant to witness, and ill accorded with the diadem of snowy white hair that crowned her head; a whisp of old lace decked the silver plaits and softened down the harshness of features that could assume stern, icy cruelty, or sweet winning smiles, as occasion demanded, or the whim of the moment influenced her.

She was just on the point of pouring herself out a cup of tea when the click of the gate arrested her attention. Down went the teapot, while a flush of rosy colour rushed to her face, giving it the hue of almost youth, as her son, with a joyous, springing step, advanced towards her.

"Well, mother mine, so you have given me a treat!" he said, gaily, stooping to kiss her in his warm frank way. "Well, you shall see how I will appreciate it by giving me a cup of your

tea at once. I'm as thirsty as any traveller in the desert."

"That being so, I wonder you delayed so long, Edward," she replied, querulously. "I cannot imagine where you get to," giving him a sharp glance of suspicious inquiry.

"I—I—only wander about the woods and lanes in hopes of finding treasures for our fernery," he remarked, with an amused smile; "a man of my time of life must have some purpose, you know."

"Why not settle down, then, to something tangible, instead of frittering your time away on useless plants and ferns."

"Maybe I shall," he laughed. "Let me see, I am thirty-eight, by Jove! I'm getting into the sere and yellow leaf with a vengeance, while you seem to look prettier and younger every day."

Her eyes positively sparkled at her son's compliment; it stirred all the vanity in her nature to be thus praised by the idol of her life, the one precious gift vouchsafed her by Heaven, the being she worshipped and guarded with a jealousy bordering upon insanity.

Left a widow at twenty, she had devoted her life to her only child, permitting no human being to come between her and him. He, in return, gave her a heart-whole, tender affection, more resembling a brother's than a son's in its gentle, protecting care. No fair woman's face had ever come between them; he had looked, sighed, and rode away, bravely resolved to place no woman before his stately, beautiful mother, whose life had been one great sacrifice for his sake.

But alas! what is human resolve against the decree of iron fate? It only mocks the mortal who dares to defy it. Such was the case with Mr. Edward Armitage who in his wanderings in the flower-spangled woods and dells had met a sweet little fairy with eyes that rivalled the forget-me-nots that gleamed in the blue patches beside the purling river bank, where he dabbled for trout, but was

caught in love's meshes instead; but how to broach his delicious secret troubled him fearfully, for well he knew the terribly jealous nature of his mother.

"Have you been studying the part of courtier as well as botanist?" she rejoined, as she helped him to cream; "at least you are more fortunate as a gallant than a collector, since I see no specimens."

He winced under this shaft and lowered his eyes lest she should see his confusion.

"Another cup of tea," he said, quickly, to distract her attention, "it tastes doubly nice out here!"

"You have not told me what you did with your plants?" she persisted.

"I gave them away, they were not worth bringing home," he stammered, rising and beating the soft turf with his cane, listlessly, and looking yearningly in the direction of the golden gorse-clad hills where nestled a dot of a cottage, embowered in eglantine and honeysuckle, the blue curling smoke of which he could discern as it ascended the sunny sky.

"Oh, Edith! my darling! if only I had the courage to tell all," he sighed; "this burden seems almost more than I can bear at times. It is the secrecy which weighs down, ah! and nearly crushes my bliss; the sickening dread of her bitter anger makes me a coward."

"Are you off again?" she asked, as he made for the gate. "Why not settle down to those accounts, Edward?" this peevishly, "you know Mr. Lynton is anxious to have them."

"I'll attend to them presently, mother mine," he answered, pleasantly. "I'm going to have a cigar and a stroll till dinner, and I know you abhor tobacco."

She watched his tall figure recede in the summer shadows till the bend in the road hid him from her view; then she sailed across the lawn, her trailing pearl-grey satin dress sweeping the grass with a queenly grace, and summoned a servant to remove the tea things.

She entered the drawing-room and stood gazing intently on a full-length portrait of her son when a lad of about fifteen. Her dark eyebrows knitted, then relaxed, as she murmured,—

"My beautiful boy, my noble son, no woman on earth must ever supplant me. A queen would not be good enough to mate with you. I have dedicated my life to you from a girl of seventeen. You are mine, all mine, my one earthly treasure!"

A faint bay-scented breeze stirred the lace curtains, mingling its sweetness with a bed of fragrant verbenas and mignonette beneath the windows, but she was too wrapped in her own selfish thoughts to heed the exquisite scents or beauties of the delightful apartment, with its rich appointments and elegant trifles which lay scattered about in all directions—prisoners old china and intaglios, rare works of art, delicate statuary, and, above all, bowls of every coloured rose, from white to the deepest crimson.

So fair a bower deserved a kinder and more appreciative mistress, one would think, whose mind was not warped with one all-absorbing desire to possess the heart and companionship of her son till the fatal hour of her life had passed away from earth; and its scorching longings, that tarnished what might have been a grand nature but for the fatal passion of jealousy and indomitable pride and arrogance which ruled her very existence, marring and obliterating all generous impulses of her woman's nature.

"Edith," whispered a voice, softly, "where are you, my bonny birdie?"

"Here I am," said a little fairy-like maiden, clad in a soft, white, clinging gown, springing down from a hammock hidden between the foliage of a couple of huge chestnut trees.

A little hand was pushed through his arm, a pair of soft blue eyes were raised to his, dancing with love's light and merriment.

"I have just one half-hour to myself, birdie, so I thought we would spend it together. Oh! my little sweetheart, you will never know how fondly, how deeply you have engraven yourself in my heart."

A rosy blush suffused her face, even to the tips of her tiny ears, while her heart beat with maidenly ecstasy at the words that fell from her lover's lips.

"I wish I was taller and nicer!" she chirped, peeping coyly up into his finely-cut features, that resembled his mother's at times marvellously.

"I wouldn't have you different to your sweet little self for kingdoms," he said, earnestly. "You are my ideal woman."

"Scarcely that yet," she laughed. "Why, I'm only seventeen, a naughty, mischievous brother says!"

"An angel!" he added, clasping the soft, rosy fingers tightly clenched in his strong hand till she flinched with pain.

"I'll try to be one for your sake when we are married," she whispered. "There is nothing I won't do to keep your love and win your mother's too!"

A shade of mental anxiety came into his dark, soulful eyes at the allusion to his mother, but he spoke hopefully, and replied,—

"A heart of stone would melt when you were the pleader. I wish she could only know you—see you as I do!"

"We mustn't expect too much, you know, Edward, you see me with eyes full of love," a mystic light shining in her large, wondrous eyes, half child, half woman; just on the threshold of life's sweet mystery, when the maiden begins to realize that her soul longs to burst its bonds like some fettered bird to join a companion spirit, to soar in regions of unexplored clouds of mysterious bliss, making her veins glow, her pulses quicken, to be followed by little flutterings of half-fear and shy tremblings at the very love she has evoked in the bolder nature of the man who wooes her.

"I see you only as you are, perfect, a queen

rose of the garden," he said, tenderly clasping the slight, girlish figure in his arms, and pressing her pure white brow to his lips. "There is but one drawback to my happiness, sweetheart, the fear of my mother's anger. I am the very coward under the sun where she is concerned."

"Will she be very angry?" the girl asked, wistfully. "Couldn't you coax her and tell her how dearly I would love her, how lonely I have been all these years without a mother's love? Oh, Edward! I feel sure her heart will respond to my devotion, and to both our pleadings."

"I can only pray it may; to-night I mean to confess all. It is impossible to keep our secret from her any longer; then, my darling, before the woods don their russet dress you will be my own sweet wife!"

Her bonny head, with its soft ringlets of curls rested on his breast; her face nestled away from his eyes lest he should see the hot, burning blushes the word wife brought into her face.

A long-love put forth its gaudy tendrils and tried to touch her cheek; bold, orange blossoms kissed her feet, while a feathered choir filled the air with melody as if to surround the rapt pair.

A lark peeped down at them from his leafy covert, then burst into a grateful anthem of joy and praise as it winged its flight to the blue vault of heaven.

They lingered a brief few moments till the shrill sound of the dinner-bell from his home brought them from paradise to the prosaic realities of earth.

CHAPTER II.

The dinner was cleared away by the well-trained servant, some luscious grapes and strawberries were placed beside a bowl of rich cream, and a decanter of claret at the master's hand.

Mrs. Armytage was toying with a bunch of purple grapes and gazing with all a mother's pride at her son, whose handsome face was now laden with intense anxiety to commence what lay like a weight on his mind.

"You have not eaten anything, scarcely," she remarked, anxiously. "Try these strawberries, dear; they are the finest I have seen this year."

"Eat!" he thought, with a sickly smile; "it would choke me to even try with this revelation on the tip of my tongue; but here goes, I must out with it, or I shall go distracted."

"Mother," he commenced, clearing his throat; "I have something very important to say—to reveal to you. See, I am no longer a young man; I may say I am on the verge of—"

"What on earth are you driving at?" she interrupted, petulantly. "Please be more explicit."

"Well, the fact is, mother mine, I—I am going to wed one of the sweetest and best girls in Christendom, a ruby beyond price, a gem without one single flaw," he blurted out, recklessly.

If a bombshell had fallen at Mrs. Armytage's feet she could not have looked more panic-stricken or horrified than at this announcement, and for a few brief moments she was unable to find speech; but at last the appalling truth burst upon her mind, with all its fierce, hateful force, that a usurper had supplanted her in the affection of her only son; then the vials of her wrath burst forth in a torrent on his devoted head, crushing out all the hope he had indulged in of the welcome his child-bride would receive at his mother's hands.

"Could you not have waited till the earth closed over me?" she said, with stinging bitterness, "but you must needs make a clandestine engagement and bring a stranger to rule beneath the roof I have been mistress of from a girl? You have acted the part of an ingrate."

"No, mother, not that, Heaven is my witness. I am no ingrate. I have been wanting in courage, a coward if you like; but my love for you has been and is, to this very moment, as deep and fervent as though it had never met my betrothed, it is now large enough to hold you both in its grasp; believe me, dear mother, when I assure you solemnly my darling Edith has ennobled, strengthened it, and made me, by her innocent love, a brighter, better, Christian and man—a worthier son."

"Who is this person?" she asked, sternly, her features relaxing in her finely cut face.

"Please do not speak of my future wife in such a term," he said, somewhat warmly.

"I must frame my language, I suppose, when I mention the name of so important a personage?" she retorted, biting her thin lips fiercely.

"I require you to do nothing but what is right, mother; simply to act with the courtesy due from the lady bearing the name of Armytage, which I feel sure you will always do, if not for my sake, at least for the memory of my father whose name you bear."

The well-merited reproach stung her to the quick; she felt abashed, humbled, at her own severity and unwomanly conduct.

Notwithstanding Mrs. Armytage's many bad traits there was much to be said in her defence. Left at an early age an orphan she married a man who worshipped her, giving way to every whim or caprice, lavishing wealth with an unstinted hand. Then death bereft her of her lower husband, whom she had loved as only a passionate, ardent nature could; then all the affection became centred in their child the one pledge of their love. The wife's love merged into the mother's, purer, brighter, stronger for its very intensity; but one all-absorbing craze took possession of her mind—that no woman should ever come between them. He, in his simplicity, led up to the idea by affirming that he had never seen the woman whom he would care to marry.

Thus matters stood till a month back, when Edith Hayes came from school to take the place of chaperone in her brother's tiny establishment.

"I do not wish to wound your father's son and retract the term person," she said, coldly. "Perhaps you will kindly inform me without further delay who the lady is. I presume she is known to me?"

"I think not; she has only lately come from school."

"A governess!" she exclaimed, almost wrathfully.

"A governess! certainly not. A simple sweet girl, the sister of Frank Hayes."

"A chit of a girl," she moaned, covering her face with her jewelled hands to shut out all light and sight. "Are you mad? Do you forget your age? You must be old enough to be her father."

The hot blood leaped into his face at her cutting words; but he checked the harsh reproof that sprang to his lips, and only said,—

"In our case age has never even crossed our thoughts. My heart is young, even if a few silver threads mingle with the darker ones; she is a tender blossom, that requires such natures as ours to nurture and form it into a strong, beautiful, everlasting flower; but you must see her and judge for yourself."

"Edward," she faltered, the hard lines about the firm mouth fading away, "I have ceased to make you happy, I have become a burden—a needless piece of furniture in this house—but I will do my duty, welcome this—new mistress to your home, then leave it for ever."

Tears dimmed the proud eyes as she uttered these words brokenly.

"Mother, do not, I beg, talk like this; you will always be the honored mistress of this house. Edith is only a simple little floweret, who will be happier for the freedom from

household cares. Come, mother mine, have a little sympathy for one who would make any sacrifice rather than offend you"—this as he took both her hands in his, and kissed the trembling lips.

"I can promise you nothing yet, my boy, I—I must see her first."

"If you will only go to the cottage and smile upon her as you do on me sometimes, you will win her heart at once."

"You forget I am no enthusiastic lover, but a woman," she observed, icily, withdrawing herself from his embrace. "You have grown romantic, the result, I presume, of this insane folly."

"Call it what you will, mother, only don't let us quarrel; we never have yet, there must be no cloud to disturb the serenity of our lives now; we two have spent too many years together to part because another loving heart wishes to share our home."

"You distress me; let me think it over by myself. It is all so sudden. I must be alone to wrestle with the galling thought of losing you for ever."

He sighed, and threw himself on a couch as she passed out of the room, for a presentiment of coming evil weighed on his mind; for lying deep down in his mother's nature he knew lurked a most cruel, bitter hatred when jealousy was once aroused.

"Perhaps it would have been better if we had never met," he mused, sadly; "she was so bright and happy, her praty eyes as sunny as the May morn that dawned upon our fateful meeting. To see those dear eyes dimmed with tears would break my heart, and make me turn renegade to the mother who has given me birth."

Mrs. Armytage sought her room and paced it like a caged lioness, moaning out ever and anon her misery in broken utterances.

"She has loved my boy from me, when I thought him safe from the toils of women; he will have fresh ties, new interests, nurse him through sickness, be his comforter and adviser. Oh! I could have borne this bitter trial with more resignation if it had come earlier. How many times have I listened for his footsteps! but now it will be another's task to wait and watch, even to pray;" her tears rushed to her eyes, as she conjured up the future in the darkest, most wretched colours, refusing to permit one ray of light upon her troubled spirit.

Worn out in body and mind, she at last sought her pillow, not even going down, as was her usual custom, to see to the looking up of the house, and give her son a good night kiss and blessing.

She failed to preside at the breakfast the following morning, but sent a cold, formal message instead to say she was suffering with a headache.

Mrs. Armytage made a hurried repast, and hastened into the library to attend to the accounts the family lawyer was waiting to receive.

About ten o'clock Mrs. Armytage rustled downstairs in a delicate dove-coloured silk dress (she had exquisite taste in such matters), a white Brussels lace shawl draped her shoulders, her bonnet was a marvel of the same rare old lace, and creamy-tinted marabout feathers.

The servants looked surprised, and hastened to open the door; but she waved them off imperiously, saying—

"Tell my son I have gone to the village, but will join him at luncheon," as she passed out, opening the door with her own delicate gloved hands.

"There's something in the wind, surely I'm dusting these chairs," blurted out the housemaid. "Why, she looked at me as if she could have eaten me; and as for the master, he never opened his lips to say 'good-morning, Jane,' as he generally does, but almost snatched my head off when I asked him if he would like some outlets for breakfast. Heigho! these rich folk don't seem to have it all sunshine no more than we humble folk."

The morning was very hot, even the flowers seemed languid, as Mrs. Armytage made her way to the Hayes' cottage. It was but a few minutes' walk which brought her to the little white gate; slowly she went up the neatly-gravelled path, hemmed in on each side by masses of geraniums and tangles of blossoms of every hue. The cottage itself was completely hidden by climbing plants; they even tried to hide the white-draped windows.

"So this is where my boy has been weaving his love-sick dream, his fool's paradise," she murmured, as she took in all the details of this sylvan retreat.

A neat little maid opened the door, and showed her into the cool fragrant drawing-room, that appeared dark after the glare of the noontide sun.

In a few seconds she was able to distinguish the room and its appointments, also a little white figure seated in a recess of the lace-mullioned window, lost apparently in a dream over a volume which lay in her lap.

Her visitor coughed and glanced towards her, then the girl realised that a stranger had been admitted. With a swift, blush-crimsoning her face she sprang up, let fall her book in her trepidation, and stood with her little hand held out to welcome her.

The truth forced itself upon Mrs. Armytage's mind of the rare, fresh loveliness of her son's choice, as the girl's face revealed itself in full. The soft touches of childhood were still stamped upon it, the sunny rippling hair fell in wavy curls over the little head, and strayed over the broad white forehead; her white muslin gown was confined at the waist by a pale pink sash, a spray of rosebuds nestled at her throat.

"Why, she's only a child!" she mentally ejaculated, as she eagerly scanned the girl's face; "my poor boy must be demoralised to place his life's happiness in the keeping of a child of a girl who seems scarcely emancipated from the nursery."

"You are Mrs. Armytage, Edward's mother?" Edith said, gently, pressing the soft gloved hand in a warm, affectionate clasp, that gained no answering response from her cold, stately visitor. It sent a quiver of disappointment and shy nervousness to the girl's fluttering breast.

"Yes, I am Edward's mother, and you are Edith Hayes, the girl he has chosen for his wife?" she replied, in a metallic, unyielding voice, that from all hope and courage in Edith, who stood almost trembling, with her pretty eyes fast welling full of tears.

"And this is Edward's mother," she thought, dimly, "whom I had fondly hoped to win, to love, to call my mother!"

"How old are you?" Mrs. Armytage asked, abruptly, breaking the tacit silence.

"I—I—am just past seventeen," a flush mantling her face, but a touch of wounded pride giving dignity to the supple little form.

"Do you know the age of my son?" this with a dash of asperity; "that, in fact, he is old enough to be your father?"

Goaded at last by the scorn and repellent manner of the haughty woman, Edith replied, in as calm a tone as she could assume,—

"I love Edward, and he—he loves me, and deems me old enough to be his wife, therefore the question of age is not in our hearts, neither will it ever be in our lives."

"Ridiculous, high-flown, romantic nonsense; child," she retorted, testily; "that a month's honeymoon will cure; when too late you will realise the sad mistake you have made in making with a man whose tastes and habits are nearly a lifetime in advance of yours."

"It is too late to alter my fate—it is fixed. I would not love him less if he was twice his age," Edith returned, firmly, repressing the tears of vexation that would start to her eyes.

"He has chosen me before the world, and I am determined to make myself worthy of the honour he has conferred upon a simple girl; it is the only return I can make to one I venerate, as well as love."

"Rhapsodical nonsense," the elder lady

muttered, under her breath; then seeing the tears sparkling in her blue eyes she said, less harshly,—

"Poor child! I do not blame you, I only pity you."

The pent-up feelings of poor Edith could bear no more, and uttering a little moan of grief she flung herself on the cushion and buried her curly head in the cushion, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

Mrs. Armytage gazed with mixed feelings of jealousy and admiration at the white-clad figure with its soft golden head bowed, which the sun seemed to love and glorify as it darted through the snowy curtains, and shed beams of radiance and tender light upon it, and then to the dimpled hands lying listlessly by her side, on which flashed the diamond betrothal ring given her by Edward Armytage.

"How lovely the child is!" thought Mrs. Armytage; "but how simple! Just the nature to fret her heart out if her whims were not gratified, or her will thwarted."

Then her thoughts took flight from the present to the past in one of those curious freaks of memory, so unaccountable to us poor mortals, and she was a girl once more; and the hot July sun was shining, the birds were singing, whilst the voice that thrilled her maiden heart to its very depths was breathing soft accents of love, that beloved voice that was now stilled for ever. The remembrance of her girlish days softened the proud old heart for one brief moment, and she stole quietly over to the couch, and bent down and kissed the tear-stained face tenderly, as she murmured,—

"Forgive me, child, if I have wounded your feelings, and say good-bye. I am a cross-grained old woman; he is my only son, and I am a widow."

There was such plaintive sorrow in the tone of her voice, such a depth of pathos that the gentle heart of the girl was stirred in a moment to deep sympathy.

Springing up with a rosy, flushed, but tear-bedewed face, she caught the old lady's hands and pressed them to her warm, rippling in a childish abandon of affection.

"You will have a daughter as well as a son soon," she murmured, softly, nestling up to her like a timid dove; "only like me a tiny bit, dear Mrs. Armytage. I will be so good, so loving and grateful."

The childish grace and gentle pleading jarred upon the jealous, stern woman as the galling idea would obtrude upon her that this fair girl would be first in the life and affection of her son, that from that hour she would only be a cipher in the home where she had reigned supreme mistress. All softness faded from her face once more, and gathering up her silk train with her wonted dignity, she said,—

"Good-bye, Miss Hayes; permit me to offer you one word of parting advice—try and deport yourself with more womanliness as befits the affianced wife of a man of mature years, and the responsibility of your altered position."

"I will try," stammered poor Edith, as she followed the stately old lady across the cool flagged hall to the front door, and even as far as the gate, a sad, wistful expression on her face, and watched her slowly wend her way down the lane; then she burst into a flood of tears.

"Oh! how cruel, how bitter it all is," sobbed the girl; "and I had hoped to make her love me, to feel a mother's kiss on my lips. Oh, Edward! my own darling, noble Edward! will you always love me when you learn how your mother despises me—perhaps hates me? What would I not give to be tall and stately and grand and clever, the kind of girl she must have been when she was young?"

Simple, artless floweret that she was, she pined to become the very type of woman her lover could never admire. It was her sweet, coy, shy, but irresistible charm that took his heart by storm, and filled him with a firm, enduring, but rapturous love.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Mrs. Armytage entered the dining-room her son rose from his chair, where he was immersed in the *Times*, to greet her, kissing her as usual in his gallant way, and putting his hand caressingly on hers.

"Have I kept luncheon, Edward?" she remarked, glancing at the timepiece.

"Well yes, about twenty minutes, I fancy," he replied, pleasantly; "you have been out, I hear. You must have found it very hot, mother dear," handing her to her chair; "have some iced claret, it will refresh you."

"I shall never care for anything in life again," she said, fretfully; "cannot you guess where I have been, Edward?"

"I can have no idea," he stammered, nervously.

"I have been to see your future wife!"

"Yes!" he exclaimed, excitedly; "and you are going to tell me how you like her, and indorse my opinions, mother, eh?"

"I am no lovesick man to go into ecstasies over a mere chit—a child—who should be in the schoolroom," she retorted, coldly.

All the joyous light fled from his eyes at this cold, harsh reply.

"Schoolroom be hanged!" he rejoined, fiercely; "why, there's more true sense in my Edith's little finger than is to be found in many of your so-called worldly women's whole body. In Heaven's name do not torture me with cruel, caustic remarks. To hear you condemn my Edith maddens me. Hayes, her guardian and brother, far from looking upon her age as a bar, says it is the reverse, and declares he would rather place the happiness of his sister in the keeping of a man than a beardless boy, whose heart is often as unstable as the wind."

"He is only too glad to see her so well settled, you mean, and off his hands."

"You are unjust, mother. I would stake my life upon the earnest desire Frank Hayes feels to ensure the happiness of a sister he dearly loves without one interested motive. You are sadly changed in your charity of heart of late."

"I see things beneath the alluring surface, Edward. I see a rich man, who, in a moment of passion, declares his love to a young girl whose vanity is flattered by the very novelty of her position; but wait till the gloss is worn off, when years pass, and she will be a young woman only in years, still wearing the bloom of beauty, while you will be grey and—"

"Stop, I wish to hear no more of your evil predictions," he interposed, gravely. "If I am happy in the present, why mar my happiness? Nothing you could ever say would make me believe Edith would prove less than a loving, true wife to me in years to come; loyalty beams from her eyes—eyes that mirror her thoughts, her very soul."

"You are master of your own actions. I have said all I intend; if the future should not turn out so *coulour de rose* as you now ardently hope and believe, you can never reproach me for not warning you before it was too late."

"It may seem churlish, nay, ungracious on my part to tell you most emphatically that such warnings, as you style them, are repugnant to my feelings; and much as I value your affection, there must be no further allusion to the subject if the old affectionate relations are to be continued between us," he said calmly, but firmly.

His mother flinched under the deserved reproof, but it hardened her heart the more against the innocent cause of their argument, and she mentally ejaculated,—

"I verily detest the baby-faced minx, for my son is no longer even dutiful to his mother; henceforth he will be nothing to me, but all and all to her, a stranger—an alien."

Luncheon was finished in silence, she not even deigning to say good-morning when she rose and left the room—a stern, grim expression on her face, that pained Edward Armytage to the quick to see, for he knew full well

it boded no good to the wee floweret he was about to gather to his breast.

A month after the little breeze over the luncheon between mother and son saw a sweet maiden, all shimmering in snowy lace and gleaming satin, standing at the altar beside her handsome bridegroom, whose face was radiant with proud smiles, as he placed the shining gold circlet on the white, rosy-tipped finger.

Mrs. Armytage stood beside them, resplendent in a pearl-grey brocade, the train adorned with clusters of ostrich feathers—a grand type of an English gentlewoman in her proud regal bearing; her eyes were not melting with womanly tears at the joy of seeing two loving hearts united, but almost fierce in their cold, steely glare, as the happy bridegroom claimed the first kiss from his beautiful bride, whose blue eyes were sparkling with a mist of pearly tears of bliss and joy.

Flowers strewn the aisle for her tiny pearl-embroidered shoes to tread, strewn by the maids of the village.

"Will you not kiss my wife?" asked Mr. Armytage, anxiously, in a whisper, to his mother, who stood like a statue hewn out of marble.

"I will if you wish," she replied, doggedly. "You cannot expect me to be as ecstatic as yourself on such an occasion."

He bit his lip to keep down the retort that sprang to it in the sacred edifice, and led Edith to her, saying,—

"Mother, give my bride a mother's blessing."

She took Edith into her arms and gave her a cold, frigid kiss, and murmured something unintelligible to the trembling girl, but she was too excited and happy to dwell upon its genuineness or heartiness; she only knew she was the happiest, proudest girl in this bright, sunny world, that she felt treading on enchanted ground as she passed out into the glowing, noontide sun on her husband's arm, amid a buzz of affectionate wishes and blessings from the group of villagers who lined the shady old churchyard.

"Heaven bless her!" mumbled many a dame as they pressed forward to catch a glimpse of her sweet, blushing face as the carriage dashed away.

Mrs. Armytage passed the curtsying line of rustics like a queen, giving a gracious nod to one or two, as a mark of recognition, but not a smile parted her lips—they remained sealed.

"Methinks the poor young cretur will have a bad time with my lady," crooned an old dame; "she's like a young bud that a cold wind 'ud blight; bad luck to the one who'd turn her smiles into tears," crunching her stick into the gravel as if to give effect to her wish.

The breakfast was finished, the health of bride and bridegroom given in a bumper of champagne; then Edith stole from the room to don her travelling raiment to gladden the eyes of her new-made husband, and entrance him further by her bewitching grace.

"This is the first time we have been separated ever since Heaven bequeathed you to my care," Mrs. Armytage said, a dry sob catching her throat as she stood taking a farewell of the only human being she really loved on earth.

"You forget, mother mine, you have two children now," he rejoined, gaily; "that in a month we shall be back and commence life in real earnest—a life made more precious by the sunny presence of your daughter."

Before she could reply Edith entered the drawing-room in her fawn-coloured dress, a dainty rose silk-lined mantelette draping her shoulders, her face shaded by the plume of feathers in her hat.

Kisses were now showered at random upon the bride, much to the discontent of Armytage, who grudged them, like a miser his hoard of gold; and he hurried her out to the carriage

lest all the nectar should be rifled from the lips of his wife.

"Oh, Edward! you naughty boy! you carried me off without a kiss from your mother!" she cooed, nestling down by his side and patting his hand in her winsome way.

"She won't break her heart at that," he thought, ruefully, but he answered merrily enough lest she should guess the jealousy that still rankled in the old lady's heart, and he succeeded so well that her laugh rippled out joyous and clear as they sped on to the station through the hot, dusty roads.

A party of urchins, swinging on a gate, set up a yell of delight as the white satin favours of horses and coachman and footman gladdened their eyes.

In went Edith's hand to her pocket, but her husband anticipated her wishes and flung a handful of silver among them, saying, ardently,—

"My precious wee wifey, I feel that I could throw diamonds to the little ragamuffins on this, the happiest day of my life! It's a blessing I haven't anything but notes, for I do verily believe I am crazed so with delight that I should have flung gold at them."

Fortunately for him the station was reached, and he consequently had to leave the realms of love's paradise to take tickets and attend to luggage, &c.; and there we will take our leave of them *pro tem*, as two are company and three fearful *de trop* on such occasions.

CHAPTER IV.

"My mother not here to receive us!—how is that, Barlow?" asked Mr. Armytage, his brow clouding with displeasure.

"The mistress left this letter for you, sir," the old servant replied; "but you will find everything ready for both you and the young mistress."

"Thanks, Barlow," his master said, trying to hide his vexation from his young wife. "Send Jane to Mrs. Armytage; she is fatigued."

Away the faithful old fellow shuffled to summon the upper housemaid, muttering,—

"It was too bad of the mistress to leave them on the home-coming of the master and his lovely young bride. Why, she's as fair as a lily; Heaven bless her bonny face!"

When Edith had gone to her room, he opened the letter and read it, but a scowl crossed his clear-out features not pleasant to behold, as he crumpled it up wrathfully, and consigned it to the cheerful fire that flickered in the grate to welcome them—a forethought of Barlow's, who thought England would be cold and cheerless after their sojourn in a warm climate like Nice.

Edith had too much tact to question her husband upon the absence of Mrs. Armytage; she could tell by his silence he was deeply annoyed, so to divert his thoughts she played and sang all his favourites till smiles chased the lines from his brow. Then they explored the garden, and his arm encircled her waist, while she would steal little coquettish glances up into his face when, by way of reward, he would snatch a kiss from her rosy lips, to be chided and told he was quite too naughty, and that he must pay a forfeit if he stole any more, which evoked only a shower in return of warm, loving kisses that brought blushes to her cheeks and a dazzling light in her eyes that he loved to see.

When he laid his head on his pillow that night he was bound to admit to his conscience that after the first disappointment in not finding his mother home to welcome their return, it certainly did not mar their enjoyment one whit; that, in fact, they were happier for being alone, with no curious eyes to watch their felicity.

Nearly a month went by; to the pair of lovers it seemed but a week, and the days too brief for their billing and cooing, Barlow called them a pair of turtle doves, and would

grin and chuckle with honest pleasure to see his master so thoroughly happy, with his young wife, who had won the affection and esteem of every member of the household by her unaffected sweetness of disposition. Even the garden boy, who cleaned knives and boots, &c., would stand in ambush an hour at the time to catch a glimpse of the lovely young mistress, and take the cuffing he generally got without a word of remonstrance for neglecting his duties.

"I see her, and she smiled, she did, on I, she did," he would mutter, triumphantly as he shuffled off with a stinging red patch on his cheek. "I doesn't mind a drubbing to see her smile."

It was evident Edith had captivated the hearts of all in her new home, and that everything was going on swimmingly, she being the idol of her husband's heart, and every one else's besides; but, alas! a change was near at hand in this little Eden, where all was serenity and peace.

Mrs. Armytage, senior, fretted and fumed at her own expatriation; a longing possessed her to visit her home and once more bask in the sunshine of her son's love before the whole of his affections were sequestered from her by his baby wife, as she termed her.

It was a brilliant day, the gorgeous hues of the summer flowers were dazzling in their beauty, as if they wished to show how lovely they were before the icy breath of death breathed over them, to make us poor mortals grieve for their loss, and keep their memory green till their resurrection.

There was a dreamy beauty everywhere that arrested the attention of Mrs. Armytage, as she gazed round, and crept in at the little side-door, and gained her room without meeting a living creature.

"Oh! ma'am, how you scared me!" gasped Jane, who ran into the room to dust it a little later on.

Laying her finger on her lips Mrs. Armytage whispered,—

"I have come back unexpectedly. I wish to surprise my son, it will please him, I know. Is he at home?"

"No, ma'am, he is gone out, but the mistress is. I saw her go into the grounds just now."

A pang thrilled through the heart of the old lady at the title *mistress*, usurped by another, but she quelled the feeling at the moment, merely saying,—

"Is your mistress quite well?" How it stung her to say the word!

"Oh, yes, ma'am. She's the very life and soul of the house," Jane answered, glibly, then looked scared and abashed as she met the displeased, steely expression in the old lady's eyes. She knew only too well it boded no good to her, so, curtseying, made her retreat under the pretence she thought she heard her bell.

"Silly jade! She's like all the rest, crazed over a baby-faced chit, whose whole existence is composed of the set of her gown or sash. Bah! it is sickening."

All at once, as she peered behind the curtains, she caught sight of Edith, clad in her favourite white, her soft golden hair running o'er with curls. She was pacing the shady part of the lawn under the spreading arms of the oaks, her pretty face bent over her book; every now and then she would raise her head as if to listen for the footstep of some one.

At last she was rewarded; there was a whistle, a sound of quick footsteps, and her husband appeared at the gate.

In a trice Edith ran to meet him, her face beaming with smiles. She put her hand caressingly through his arm, then a spirit of fun possessed her, and she dropped his arm, and, clasping her hands behind her, danced backwards before him in childish glee, to express her joy, and the little pink kid slippers seemed to skim the ground like some fairy of the celestial regions.

"Hoyden?" muttered her mother-in-law in utter disgust; "why, she hasn't even

learnt proper prudence. A fitting partner for my poor son, I must say!"

The sight of Edith's levity, as she styled it, proved too much for her nerves; the curtain dropped, and she set to work to change her toilette to be ready for dinner.

"Dinner is just going in, ma'am," whispered Jane, popping her head into the room about seven o'clock.

"They have no idea I am here?"

"Oh! dear no, ma'am! I wouldn't have told for all the gold in the Indies," returned Jane.

Nerving herself for the surprise she was about to give the pair, she glided down the stairs, turned the handle of the drawing room door softly, and entered.

She started visibly as a sight she had never expected met her eye. There was her son on his knees at the feet of his wife, while she was in the act of curling into a Brutus lock a piece of his front hair.

Something attracted their attention, it was the rustle of Mrs. Armytage's dress.

Edward started up, his face flushed exclaiming,—

"Why, mother, is it really you? How you have surprised us!"

"I fear not pleasantly," she said, drily, as he kissed her tenderly.

Very kindly Edith approached, and put up her dewy mouth to be kissed, and to welcome her new mother back to their home.

"What a pair of sillies you must have thought us," she said, demurely, "but there, you see, we haven't quite settled down into married folk yet."

"So it seems," returned the old lady, courtly, giving her a formal kiss on her cheek, and taking in the details of her daughter-in-law's peach-satin dress, dubbing her an extravagant minx to wear so costly a robe to dine *en famille*.

"Do you expect visitors?" she asked, staring significantly at Edith's rich dress and display of jewels—presents from her devoted husband.

"No, we are quite alone," stammered Edith. "I suppose you wonder why I wear this grand gown? Edward likes to see me in this one, especially with the emeralds he bought me, so I indulge him, you see. Why should all my pretty gowns be reserved for other people?"

"You forget that when once the freshness of a dress is gone you cannot be seen in it before company," she replied, in a severe tone that quite awed the little wife.

"Then she shall have another peach-satin, mother," her son interposed, "fifty if she likes."

"Have you unearthed a gold mine, Edward, since your marriage?" she asked, sarcastically.

"Yes, my wife is my gold mine, for she bestows more happiness on me than riches ever could," he said, gravely, offering his mother and wife each an arm, and leading them into dinner.

Edith looked nervous when he placed her at the bottom of the table, saying, reassuringly,—

"Mother will understand the fitness of our new position, my love, and I am sure will say with me that you are a perfect little chatelaine."

Edith did her very best to deserve her husband's praise, and did the honours of the table with a shy, winning grace all her own; yet, notwithstanding her efforts, the evening passed off wearily, and after a little music Edith proposed a stroll in the moonlit garden, which pleased Edward mightily, for, somehow, the presence of his mother seemed to oppress the atmosphere; they were certainly three in every sense of the word.

"Going out in the chilly night air? Why, it's absolute madness, Edward," his mother observed. "Why that child is making you even forget what is due to your health, and hers, too."

"We are not porcelain, mother," he laughed,

as he put on his straw hat, and bounded out after his wife.

"What a blessing I have returned," she thought, dismally. "It is time they had one sensible person in the house to advise and warn them of their ridiculous carryings on."

Somehow, she did not feel she was so necessary when she retired to rest, for her son said very pointedly, as he handed the bedroom candlestick to her,—

"Get as much rest as you can, mother, for Edith is going to have a little house-warming to-morrow evening, and she would like to see you at your best."

A party on, and without consulting her, or even mentioning it the whole evening! It was the last drop in the cup of her humiliation, but she would not let them see how bitterly she felt the slight.

"It seems to me you are rather unwise to permit your young wife to enter so soon into gaieties before she really understands the duties of mistress of an establishment, or how to act with dignity as a young matron," she said, tartly.

"I have no intention of curtailing my wife's amusements or pleasures," he rejoined, haughtily.

"You forget you are putting her into the way of countless temptations."

"What do you mean?" he asked, angrily.

"Simply that Edith, though a wife, is only a child in years, and has no knowledge of the allurements she is sure to meet in the whirl of society."

"It will only make me appreciate my darling husband and my home the more," chimed in Edith, going up and placing both her hands in his to stem the coming storm she saw gathering on Edward's usually placid brow.

"Heaven bless you, my wee wifey," he said, reverently, as he stooped and kissed her up-turned face, and permitted her to lead him into the next room. "Blessed are the peace makers."

CHAPTER V.

THINGS were turned topsy-turvy the next day; in fact, everything was in confusion. Dinner was served at two o'clock in the morning-room, and a regular scramble it was, for Barlow was up to his eyes in work.

Edith was all of a flutter, darting here and there, putting last touches to the flowers in the bowls and vases, and draping the curtains to her fancy; Mrs. Armytage looked on with stony indifference, while her son went into rhapsodies over his wife's little gleams of artistic taste, and helped her by acting as her major-domo throughout the day till the last finishing touch was completed; then they all retired to their rooms to dress. Mrs. Armytage was the first in the drawing-room, resplendent in crimson and gold brocaded satin, a whisp of pearl lace crowning her silvery hair; she was quickly followed by Edith in her wedding gown, a cloud of gleaming satin and lace; white roses in the place of orange blossoms decked her hair and bosom.

When her husband entered she went up to him, trailing her satin robes in all their virgin purity, like a regal princess, and gave him a sweeping coquettish curtsy, opening her fan and glancing over it archly; it was innate grace and coquetry combined.

He stood wrapped in admiration for a moment, then burst out rapturously,—

"Why, my love, you are so lovely, so bewitching, that I would bet a thousand pounds no woman will outvie you to-night."

"Gracious me, how you do flatter the child!" his mother added, reprovingly.

"I couldn't do that, mother; she is too perfect to require insincerity, she is a queen among the roses."

"Call me always your queen among roses," Edith pleaded, coaxingly, taking a tiny bud from her bosom and offering it to him.

"I accept this as a proof that you shall always be my queen, as well as queen of the

roses," he rejoined, placing the bud in his buttonhole. The sound of carriage wheels on the gravel drive put an end to the pretty domestic scene which the old lady looked upon as romantic rubbish, as she sat and frowned at the happy couple from her corner by the window, where she could watch the arrivals.

Edith stood at the drawing-room door, beside her husband, to receive her guests, a delicate flush on her face, her eyes sparkling with pleasurable excitement, and made conquest of most of the ladies, as well as the sterner sex, who seemed completely charmed by her irresistible manner and fresh young beauty.

"What a lucky fellow old Armytage is," remarked a gentleman confidently to a friend, "By Jove! I wish I had seen her before him, I would have tried to cut him out or perished in the attempt."

"Why not storm the citadel, dear boy—it's not too late?" drawled his friend.

"I never go in for other men's property, Duncan. I leave that kind of game for those who are less thin-skinned—for such gay dogs as yourself."

Mr. Armytage was just behind the speakers in an alcove; he bit his lip with rage to hear Edith's name bandied by men of such a stamp, and for a second he regretted having launched her into the vortex of wordlings, but wished he had taken his mother's advice, and kept his rose shielded from the contact of the butterflies of society.

Edith danced once with her husband, then she was besieged with would-be partners, and it certainly did not make him too comfortable as he saw her slender waist clasped by young, handsome men, in the heyday of their manhood; but he bore it bravely, for her eyes always sought him out when the dance was over, his being the only hand she would permit to minister to her wants in the way of refreshments.

"You will make yourself ill," Mrs. Armytage ventured to whisper, admonishingly; "you are quite flushed, Edith."

"Am I?" she said, docilely; seating herself by the old lady and using her fan to cool her face.

"It is Edith—I mean Miss Hayes," said a gentleman taking a seat beside her.

Edith turned as pale as the roses in her bosom, a little quiver came from her lips as she tried to frame some reply; then with a supreme effort, for she caught her husband's eyes fixed upon them, also Mrs. Armytage's, she rose and whispered something, and in another minute she was out on the balcony.

"Who is that man, Edward?" his mother asked, bridling up with virtuous indignation; "really the flirtations of your wife are scandalous. I wonder you can stand coolly by and permit it."

"I wish you would kindly leave Edith alone," he replied, loyally; "you forget that she is only a girl in years."

"You evidently do, or you would not act so unwisely."

"I am no Othello, mother," he retorted, gloomily; "my wife's happiness is mine. Please forbear pestering me with your baseless suspicions."

"Well, my pet, I fancy you have danced enough," he said, as she joined him a little later, "you look pale!"

"I am all right. Oh! Edward, do not ask me to give up the last dance before supper; indeed, I am not the tiniest bit tired."

"You have met an old acquaintance?" he commenced.

"Yes, a very, very old friend," she repeated, playfully; "I haven't seen him since he went abroad three years ago."

"A friend of Frank's, I suppose?"

"Yes, oh! yes, and an old playfellow of mine and Harry's; he is so nice, you will like him over so much, dear!"

"I hope I shall," he responded; "did you include him among your invitations?"

"No; he has just come from Malta, and is

staying with the Watneys, so they brought him here."

"You must introduce him to me presently."

"He will be delighted," she said; "suppose we go and find him?"

The two gentlemen were soon on apparently friendly terms, though Edith noticed a constrained manner in her husband, foreign to his frank nature.

"May I have the pleasure of calling to-morrow and renewing our old friendship?" Aubrey Lacy whispered, as he took his leave.

Edith murmured, and bowed her head in acquiescence.

"Well, dearest, how have you enjoyed your first reception?" her husband asked, as the last freight of revellers drove away.

"Ever so much; it was delightful!" going up to him and resting her head on his shoulder in her loving way that spoke volumes; "but I am getting sleepy now," this with a little yawn; "take your little queen to rest."

Together they ascended the stairs Darby and Joan fashion, she happy as a bird, he contented to know his darling was safely nestling her bonny head on his breast.

"Going out, Edward? Surely you can put off your engagement?" remarked his mother, after breakfast the next morning. "Mr. Lacy—your wife's old friend—she tells me is coming."

"Well, I am sure Edith can entertain him without even my assistance," he laughed, "and he will excuse me when she tells him my appointment was important."

"Are you blind to the danger you are incurring to permit the visits of a young, attractive man to your house in your absence, and one who has evidently been on such intimate terms as he has with Edith?"

"What do you mean? What terms?"

"Surely you have eyes, and saw the meeting as well as I?"

"Mother, do not try to break my faith in Edith's loyalty," his eyes literally blazing, "She is purity and innocence itself, and needs no espionage from you. She has my unbounded confidence."

"Your wife will not receive any espionage from me," she snapped, "as I shall remain in my apartments all to-day till you return." With this parting shaft she stalked from the room, her head erect, boiling over with wrath.

About twelve o'clock she saw Mr. Lacy enter in the grounds, and heard the hall door open and the tripping, childish laugh of Edith; and her face became grim and stern as she watched the timepiece, and saw nearly two hours had passed since he called.

Unable to quell her curiosity any longer she determined to break up the *à-la-tête* by her presence, just as he mounted his horse and rode away.

"Mr. Lacy is evidently not a stickler for etiquette," she commenced, when she presented herself in the drawing-room, "to stay such an unheard-of time on his first call!"

"Well, you see, we had so much to chat about—old memories, and dear old days; that can never come again."

"They must have been very happy ones to keep you two hours in deely conversation. Why, lovers are not allowed such privileges!"

Edith crimsoned, and her blue eyes flashed for an instant with anger; then she remembered the old lady was his mother, and revoked the retort that sprang to her lips.

"Mr. Lacy and I did not stand on ceremony to-day, he being almost a brother to Frank and to me in the old days," she replied, in a firm voice, and looking unflinchingly into Mrs. Armytage's face.

A few days after the visit of Aubrey Lacy husband and wife met him on horseback. He dismounted and joined them, throwing the reins over his arm, and walking beside Edith, who looked prettier than ever, with a bright flush mantling her face of evident pleasurable excitement.

Mr. Armytage noted with a secret pang his

bright, handsome face and curly brown hair, and his well-bred ease of manner, and it occurred to him that he was dangerously good-looking and fascinating; but, like the noble fellow he was, he trampled the jealous feeling from his thoughts, and entered into conversation frankly and freely.

Mr. Lacy accompanied them home to the gate; then, as if to make up for the doubts he had entertained towards him, Armytage asked him to waive all ceremony and stay to dinner.

It is needless to say the hospitable offer was accepted, and it proved one of the most pleasant dinners for Mr. Lacy knew many topics of the day, and was a brilliant talker. After dinner the gentlemen joined the ladies almost immediately. Mr. Armytage asked Edith to favour them with some music; she turned to their guest, and said,—

"Let us sing some of our duets."

He complied, then her fingers strayed over the keys, and soon their two voices blended together in a volume of sweet harmony. Mr. Armytage sat in the shade of a lamp, a look of pain on his face as he thought,—

"Would it have been better to have left my rose unplucked? Was it fair to fetter her innocent, young life before she had even felt the yearnings of love, or the great responsibility she was entering upon in becoming my wife?"

Coffee being served broke his sad reverie, and also the music. With her own deft little fingers she persisted in pouring out her husband's coffee, as was her custom, notwithstanding the presence of their guest, then they all settled down to a very merry chat.

Presently Barlow entered with letters. Edith, always impulsive, snatched one addressed to her off the salver. It had a purple and gold crest.

"May I?" she pleaded, peeping gleefully into the side of the envelope, dying to open it.

"Certainly, my love," her husband rejoined. "I am sure Mr. Lacy will excuse you."

Soon her face broke into sunny smiles, and bursting out with delight she exclaimed,—

"Oh! Edward, it is such delicious news! Only fancy! Lady Raymond has written to invite us to her house in London. There is to be no end of grand fun!" and away she danced and pirouetted around in a perfect maze of delight.

"You surely do not wish to accept it?" he questioned. "Why, we have only just settled down. So much dissipation, I fear, will injure your health."

She gave a little moue of dissent, and said, wheedlingly,—

"I would dearly like to go, Edward. Don't be a rusty old ogre, and shut me up in this dear old place."

"As you please, my darling; if you have set your mind upon accepting Lady Raymond's invitation you shall not be disappointed. Your will is my law."

"Infatuated fool!" his mother muttered, spitefully. "You will rue your weakness yet to a girl who has only cast a glamour over your senses, while I have not one particle of influence over one whom I have nurtured and watched from his cradle."

Mr. Lacy seemed very pleased to hear his host and hostess were going to visit the metropolis, remarking that he was going on a visit too, to help Lady Raymond in some private theatricals for a hospital charity.

"We shall make a pleasant party, then!" Edith chirped, bubbling over with happiness at the glorious pleasure in perspective.

"Then I shall not have the pleasure of seeing you both till we all meet in Eaton-square," said Lacy, as he bade them adieu.

"I shall count the hours," chimed in Edith.

"The idea of it! It will keep me from sleeping, I know it will. I have longed to visit London, and see all the sights—the dances, the theatres, the balls, and—"

"Little dreamer, you will catch cold!" her husband said, fondly leading her from the

hall door, after giving Lacy a hearty good-night.

Mrs. Armytage would have remonstrated with her son upon this proposed visit, but she feared to vex him, so the day arrived at last, and Edith departed with her dotting husband, laden with huge basket trunks crammed with finery.

They returned in a fortnight instead of the week they were invited for, but there was a weary, jaded look on Edward's face his mother was quick to notice.

Edith, on the contrary, was as lively as a cricket, and full of the gay doings she had assisted in, and gave the old lady a glowing description of the balls, routs, and dinners, and with what elate theatricals had gone off. Mr. Lacy's name was never omitted, but constantly recurring, so her listener gathered from this that he had promoted and shared all her pleasures.

"Well, Edward, and how did you enjoy it all?" she asked, sentimentally.

"As well as can be expected," he returned, "Lady Raymond's a capital hostess, and allows her guests to amuse themselves as they please."

"But you look dreadfully jaded, dear boy?"

"Well, yes, I am glad to be home again," he replied, wearily.

"He is just commencing to see how rash he has been," she thought, with a sigh. "Poor boy! I knew the awakening would surely come, sooner or later, but I will watch and be vigilant—she shall not break his heart by faithlessness. I will foil her, come what may!"

CHAPTER VI.

Cold, cheerless winter, with its frost and snow, set in, and its cruel, penetrating east winds confined Edith to the house, for she was not very strong, and her husband watched her with the fond eyes of adoring love, lest she should risk the inclement weather, and brave its severity.

As they sat over breakfast, one keen February morning, a startled cry came from his lips as he read one of his letters.

"Fancy, mother, Uncle John is dying, and I must take the first train to Belfast! It is his last wish to see me, poor old fellow!"

The whole household was up in arms now, for no time was to be lost.

"Heaven only knows how wretched it makes me to leave you, my precious one," he said, tenderly, as Edith lay in his arms weeping silently; "but I shall soon be back. If I left the poor old man to die without going it would be an everlasting reproach to me. Come, cheer up, my darling! and speed me on my journey by one of your sunny smiles, and say, 'Heaven bless my dear husband,' and bring him home safely."

She repeated the words fervently, then he carried her to the coach, and catching his mother's hand, said solemnly,—

"Mother, I give over to your keeping my only earthly treasure; watch over her, guard her with your whole love and protection, for my sake. You know how delicate she is, and how it wrings my heart to be torn from her at this critical time."

"I promise all," his mother answered, "go in peace; no harm shall come to her that I can avert."

"Heaven bless you, mother dear; then I make you responsible for my darling wife," he replied, huskily, kissing her affectionately, and tearing out of the room, lest his courage should fail him, and leave the dying request unheeded.

The first day he was away Edith fretted very much, but she seemed to rally marvelously when she received a letter from him; but there was another letter that Mrs. Armytage looked with grave suspicion at, for it seemed to enchain Edith's attention long after her husband's, for she kept re-reading it, and folding it up with trembling fingers.

"I hope you have no disagreeable news, Edith?" she asked.

The colour mounted to her temples as she quickly thrust the missive into her pocket.

"No, oh, no; it is only a silly letter," she stammered.

"I would give something to take a peep in it, silly or not," thought the suspicious old lady.

All that day Edith was restless and feverish, watching the gate as if she expected someone she was pining to see.

"Can it be from Mr. Lacy, saying he is coming to see us, and she is sly enough to keep it a secret? I must be on the alert, and watch her every movement."

The next day Edith wrote a long letter to her husband, and another one to the unknown writer.

"Shall I put your letters with mine in the post-bag?" her mother-in-law asked.

"No, thanks; I want a little fresh air, and it is a very nice morning. I will post them myself," Edith rejoined, colouring up guiltily, a habit she had when confused.

"It is much too cold for you to venture out with your chest."

"I feel stifled, mamma, indeed I do," Edith pleaded, anxiously. "I haven't been out for weeks. I really must have air."

"Then I shall accompany you. Edward placed you in my care, and in your delicate state it would be wrong for me to permit you to go alone."

"As you please," she sighed, wrapping her fur-lined cloak around her, and giving a little shiver.

"Why, you are trembling with cold now, child!" The old lady softened as she saw the wistful little face, so woe-begone and piteous, gazing tearfully out of the window, as if longing for the protecting love of her husband. "Come, let me take off your cloak, dear."

"No, no," she cried, excitedly; "I must go out, I tell you."

"Then you shall," and away she hastened to dress for the walk without another word.

"Let me put them in the letter-box, dear, I can see you are tired. I am stronger than you, and will get there in time for the post," Mrs. Armytage coaxed.

"I will put them in myself," Edith said, firmly; "it is a whim of mine, but I am resolved."

"She has a will of iron," muttered Mrs. Armytage, bitterly annoyed at being foiled in reading the name and address of this unknown writer.

All the rest of the day Edith lay curled up on her couch in a kind of half-waking, half-dozing state; at nine o'clock she said,—

"I think I will retire now; I am very poor company. I suppose the fatigue has told upon me," going up and kissing her mother, and bidding her good-night.

In about half-an-hour Mrs. Armytage went to her room; but instead of seeking her couch she sat in her easy chair beside the fire, musing over the vexed question of that letter—she could not endure defeat.

She sat on, revolving in her mind all manner of ways and means to force the truth from Edith, when she fancied she heard the click of the hall door.

"It must be my fancy," she murmured, consulting her watch; "why, it is past twelve o'clock, and the servants went to bed an hour and a-half ago."

Then she opened her door, and listened over the balustrade; a cold blast of frosty air rushed up into her face from some open door or window.

Her heart beat madly with alarm, for she thought at the moment there must be thieves in the house.

Quick as thought she ran across the landing to Edith's room.

"Gracious heavens," she gasped, "what is the meaning of this?" grasping the brass post of the bedstead lest she should fall, and staring at the untroubled bed with dazed eyes.

"Where is Edith? Oh, my son, my son! what can have happened?"

In a perfect panic of fear she nerved herself sufficiently to grope her way downstairs, and was close to the drawing-room, where a light gleamed through the door, which was not quite closed—and the sound of Edith's voice talking to someone sent the life-blood rushing up into her heart.

She was spell-bound; but her senses seemed quickened as a fearful suspicion took possession of her that this was the unknown writer of the letter that had wrought such a change in Edith's demeanour.

"Trust me, Edith, I swear I will atone for the past," a man's voice said. "Heaven alone knows what I should have done without your love and aid, but my future life shall expiate all my faults. Do you believe me, dear?"

"Oh! the black treachery of that baby-faced, shameless hussey," Mrs. Armytage faltered, "the base infamy of it all! Shall we ever survive the awful disgrace, the shame?" and she buried her face in her hands, as if to shut out all further sound.

But Edith's voice came up clear and sweet in spite of all.

"Yes, I do, firmly, solemnly, for I know by your face you have suffered. As for me I haven't known a happy hour since you wrote telling me your trouble; but now you must go. I wouldn't have Mrs. Armytage find you here for worlds."

"Never fear, dear. I would die rather than get you into trouble."

Then there was the sound of a passionate kiss, given and returned, the hall door gently opened and closed, and a sigh of relief from Edith.

Without a moment's consideration, her mother-in-law rushed wildly into the room and confronted the poor girl, with a face stony and pallid with indignant wrath.

A stifled cry broke from Edith's lips.

"What is the meaning of this midnight assignation, madam? What have you to say?"

Edith covered her face with her hands, as if to screen herself from the sea thing stare of her accuser.

(To be concluded in our next.)

THE consumption of eels in London amounts to 1,700 tons a year.

HONEST MEN.—Some men are born honest, some achieve honesty, and some have honesty thrust upon them by the force of circumstances, and because they have no opportunity of, or inducement for, being dishonest. There are men so naturally constituted as to be as unable even to dream of doing anything dishonest as they are unable to converse in Sanskrit. There are men again who are honest by strong conviction and deliberate determination to boss. There are other men, however, and these are by far in the majority, who are honest only because it is their material advantage to be so. It has been well said that the man who is honest only because "honesty is the best policy" is but one remove from a rogue. There are a great many spoiled rogues in the world who pass for, and are, as the world takes it, "honourable men." They are honourable citizens, honourable church members, honourable sons, husbands, and fathers. They are honest because it pays, and because there is a fine feeling of self-complacency derivable from the condition, but they would not scruple to be dishonest in a moment if they could be so safely for some tangible object to be gained. And yet they would then and always hotly resent the smallest insinuation against their "personal honour." And quite sincere and conscientious would be their resentment—such a curious complexity is the human creature—so difficult it is for him to understand his own constituents.

BOUND NOT TO MARRY.

—:—:—

CHAPTER V. (continued.)

FORTUNATELY for his comfort the rain blows off, and he can walk down to the sea and enjoy the feeling of freshness that is upon everything around him.

Meanwhile a change comes over Florry Trefusis. As soon as the young man is gone she signals to Eleanor that she wishes to speak with her alone, and when she reaches her bedroom she indulges in a flood of tears.

"Oh, my darling Nell, I have only you left to me!" she sobs. "My father, to whom I devoted my life, has married a woman, and I—I am alone in the world."

"Married! Captain Trefusis married?" repeats Eleanor in dismay.

"Yes, married—secretly," and from the tone in which Florry hisses out this last word, an impartial observer would be led to imagine that Captain Trefusis had done wisely in being married secretly if he wished to avoid a scene.

"Were you not prepared for it?" asks Eleanor, curiously.

"No, not in the least!" is the reply; "I had never seen the girl. I haven't seen her yet, for papa wrote to tell me what he had done, and to beg that I would receive his wife kindly, and make her feel that she was mistress of the house. He added that if I did not he should have to provide me with another home, as his Mary had been very reluctant to marry a man with a grown-up daughter."

"And what did you do?" asks Eleanor with sympathy.

"I did not answer the letter," is the lofty reply; "if papa forgets what is due to me I cannot forget it myself. If his new wife is to be mistress of the house I will not live in it, so I packed up everything belonging to me and came away; and now I am homeless."

There is quite a tragic look in her face, and Eleanor hastens to say.

"No, you are not homeless; your home will be with me, so long as you have no home of your own."

"You are very kind, dear," is the desponding answer, "and I know you mean it; but you will soon get married, and then I shall again be homeless."

"I shall never marry!" replies Eleanor with decision, "never. I am bound not to marry, but perhaps you will, and if you do not we shall be two old maids together!"

And she laughs, but the joke does not please Florry, who says with some asperity,—

"I don't mean to be an old maid, neither do I believe you do. I can't imagine anything more dreadful!"

"Well, we won't discuss that subject at present," says Eleanor, with a laugh; "but now you must make yourself at home. Don't expect to be treated like a visitor, but order anything you want, and do just as you like. I will have a room fitted up as a studio for you."

Whereupon Florry embraces her friend, and Eleanor leaves her for a time, while she goes down stairs to inform Mrs. Pritchard that Miss Trefusis will for the future reside with them.

The widow is not an aggressive woman, neither is she one to make objections to a plan that does not concern her, and she thinks the addition to the family will be rather pleasant than otherwise.

She says so frankly, and thus dissipates any doubt on the subject which Eleanor might otherwise have had.

Later in the day, when Florry rejoins the others, she sees, or fancies she sees, that some change has come over Eleanor since they last met. What the change exactly consists in she can scarcely say, but she detects a dreamy softness in her friend's face and manner that is new to her.

"I should think she was in love if there were anybody here for her to fall in love

with; but I don't think it is with that artist whom I found here when I came," she muses, "though I am convinced she will no more die an old maid than I shall!"

It is in the nature of this girl to make a study of the feelings and motives and intentions of those with whom she comes in contact. She likes to know their business and everything concerning them, and she rarely rests until she has discovered all that there is to learn.

As the rain, though it clears off for awhile, comes on again, they decide that it will be best to remain indoors, and they spend what is to Eleanor a very pleasant evening.

Florry Trefusis cannot sing, but she is a good musician, and she plays exquisitely; and as Eleanor sings and Mrs. Pritchard plays the harp, they have quite a musical evening.

"But where is our audience?" sighs Florry, looking round the large room, in which there is not a solitary listener.

She has all her life been accustomed to the society of gentlemen rather than of ladies, and she cannot realise that it is possible to enjoy life without the companionship and admiring applause of one or more of the opposite sex.

Eleanor, on the contrary, has been brought up apart from men, and except from books she knows little of their habits of thought, for Miss Darrel was not only a confirmed old maid herself, but she never lost an opportunity of expressing her dislike to the society of men, the consequence being that she was seldom troubled with it; and even when she was planning a union between her nephew Hugh Darrel and Eleanor, it was rather with a view to the enjoyment of her property by both of them, than with any idea that marriage would add to the happiness of either.

So, though Eleanor liked the company of well-bred men, she was not dependant upon it for her comfort; while Florry, on the contrary, felt that the stimulus for work, and the keen enjoyments of life, were missing if her audience and companions consisted only of women.

"I hate a cat's party," she would say at times, when she had been compelled to spend an hour or two with a number of girls; and now she had taken up her residence with Eleanor she was determined to make the acquaintance of some pleasant, and possibly eligible young men.

A resolution easily made, but not always so easily carried out, though Florry Trefusis anticipates no difficulty in doing so.

She is a girl of the present century. She has not a particle of vice about her; she is not what is ordinarily termed "fast," but there is an easy-going unconventionality in her manner which seems to be characteristic of girl artists, who will talk to a man without introduction as freely as to a girl, who will paint and discuss pictures in their company, and never think of immodesty, though spiteful people are apt to say that this is because they know so little what real modesty means.

But it is only spiteful people who make these remarks, and the type of girl is becoming so common that we meet at least one of them, go where we will.

Clever they undoubtedly are, but whether they are lovable or not is less easy to decide.

At breakfast, the morning after her arrival, Florry announces that she wants to go to Ipswich, and asks Eleanor if she will go with her.

"Yes, I have nothing else of importance to do," is the answer, "and the day bids fair to be fine. Shall we go by boat, road or rail?"

"By boat, by all means," is the decisive answer. "I delight in going on the water."

"Do you feel disposed to go with us, Mrs. Pritchard?" asks Eleanor kindly.

"If you want me I will go," replies that lady cheerfully; "but if you do not I can amuse myself by sitting about on the sands."

"We shan't be away very long," here Florry

remarks consolingly. "I want to buy some colours and canvas and brushes, and a few little odds and ends that I had not time to look after before I left town."

So the matter is arranged, and the two girls dress and drive into Harwich, where they arrive just in time to catch the steambot that will take them up the Orwell to Ipswich. The tide is low, though it is coming in and carrying them with it, but the wide expanse of mud on either side of the stream cannot be called picturesque, and Eleanor remarks cheerfully,—

"It will be much prettier when we come back, for then the tide will be high; but now it is rather cold. Don't you feel it so?"

"No, I am never cold," is the answer, "and I quite enjoy this. I believe I shall meet some people I know in Ipswich. I have a presentiment that two or three artists are in the neighbourhood."

"Your presentiment would probably be correct if you said two or three dozen," replies Eleanor, with a laugh, "for they are everywhere. But what are you looking at so intently?"

Eleanor asks this question as they are about to land, and Florry answers frankly,—

"I am looking at that handsome man over there on the promenade. I wonder who he is?"

Eleanor's eyes follow the direction indicated, and her face is dyed with blushes, while she feels positively confused.

And at that same instant the gentleman's eyes are attracted to her; a kind of electric thrill comes over both of them simultaneously, and the colour on his brown cheek deepens as he advances to meet the woman from whom he had so recently fled.

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them as we will," he mutters to himself, with a smile at his own weakness; and thus Eleanor Rosevear and Jack Hughes meet again.

CHAPTER VI.

"SO, MY LADY FAIR, WE MEET AGAIN!"

STARTLED by her own sensations, and fearing to betray them, Eleanor assumed a composure she was far from feeling, and she shook hands with Mr. Hughes, and introduced her friend as calmly as she could. Then still feeling terribly self-conscious, she tried to say lightly,—

"You owe me an apology for leaving us so abruptly the other day, Mr. Hughes?"

"Do I? Then pray allow me to make it," he replies, looking at her soft brown eyes, her fair white face, framed in its abundance of bright russet hair, and thinking that a man might readily be forgiven who counted the world well lost for the love of such a woman.

He is not a very young man, being fully eight-and-twenty, and he knows quite well that only a year ago she was twenty one, but though he has in his time admired many girls, he has never till this hour known what it is to be really in love.

No, not even with Eleanor herself.

True, he had been struck by her face the first time he had seen it, and he had been conscious from that moment that there was danger for him in her society; consequently he had shunned her, and armed himself against her, so much so, that had he not now been taken unawares he would probably have escaped from the meshes which the blind-god had laid for his feet.

The sensation of falling over head and ears in love with a beautiful woman is by no means an unpleasing one, and he yields, to the fascination with an amount of weakness such as he had never previously shown.

"Why did you go away without saying good bye to me?" asks Eleanor, pursuing the subject, rather because she does not know what else to talk about for the moment than from any desire to persist in a disagreeable inquiry.

"I thought you were too much interested in the gentleman who called to see you to remember me," he answers, evasively.

"What an absurd excuse! It is not even as though Mr. Merton were a friend," retorted Eleanor; "he is only my lawyer."

"A lady's lawyer sometimes brings her very pleasant news," returned Hughes, with a smile that was not altogether natural.

"Then my lawyer in this case did quite the reverse," says Eleanor, in a tone of annoyance. "He came to tell me that a law-suit is about to be commenced against me; and when I declared myself ready to give up all that is to be contended for he says that my motives will be misunderstood, and that I must fight the case."

"Must!" repeats Hughes, dubiously.

"Yes," replies the girl, with a flash of spirit and a rich, low laugh; "as though any lawyer could make a woman do what she had once made up her mind that she would not do."

"Then you don't mean to follow his advice?" he asks, almost eagerly.

"No. I shall let him go on for a little while," answers Eleanor, with a sigh, "and then I shall take matters into my own hands, and act according to my own judgment. I think the young man has been very badly used, not by me, but by his aunt, who left an estate that ought to have been his to me, and I am quite willing to give it up to him under certain conditions."

"Does he know this?" asks Mr. Hughes, gravely.

"Yes, he must know it, because I saw a letter from his mother, saying that she and her son refused to accept any concession from me, and would take only what the law gave them."

"And the law has given them nothing, I suppose?" he asks, carelessly.

"No. They are only just about to appeal to the law, so I shall wait till they are ready to go to trial, and then if the lawyers cannot agree I shall hand over all they ask for."

"And in that magnificent manner make them feel their own insignificance and heap coals of fire upon their heads," remarks Mr. Hughes, almost mockingly.

"No; I have no desire to do anything magnificent," she says, calmly, and gazing at him in some surprise; "and though I should be more than human if I did not resent the way in which Mrs. Darrel has both written and spoken of me I believe her son to be a very harmless young man, and I am quite sure he has a much better moral right to Darrel Court than I have. He is the representative of the family, whereas I don't in the least belong to them; besides, the property is to go to him when I die, so he had better take it now than spend his life in praying for my death."

"Much better, I should say; but you don't seem to have a very exalted opinion of this very harmless young man!"

And as he says this Mr. Hughes laughs as though he had uttered something like a joke.

"I cannot say that I have formed any opinion of him, except that he seems to be tied to his mother's apron strings," replies Eleanor, as though she were weary of the subject. "If he or his mother had been in the least degree friendly with Miss Darrell while she lived, or to me when she died, there would have been no need to go to law about any of the property."

He looks at her steadily while she says this, but she means literally what she says and no more; and she either does not or will not see that any particular significance can be attached to her words.

Florry Trefusis perceives it in a moment, however, and seizing the first opportunity for joining in the conversation she says, bluntly,—

"I suppose Mrs. Darrel and her son think that there can be no arrangement with you but a matrimonial one."

At this Eleanor's pale face becomes crimson, and she says, with more heat than is usual with her,—

"They may set their minds at rest on that matter, for no earthly power would ever make me consent to such an arrangement. But I am wearying you with my own vexations, Mr. Hughes. Do let us talk about something more cheerful."

"What would you consider more cheerful?" he asks, in an absent way, as though he were thinking of something far removed from what he was saying.

But Eleanor is equally distraught. Florry's remark has irritated her, and has brought back too many unpleasant circumstances to her mind to be easily and immediately swept away; and instead of answering her companion's question she responds with what she feels to be an idiotic laugh.

"The most cheerful subject that I can think of at this moment is luncheon," remarks Florry Trefusis, who was never known to be otherwise than hungry.

"Luncheon! A capital idea," exclaims Hughes, in a tone of intense relief. "Let us go and look for some by all means."

And though Eleanor hesitates, from the conviction that she will not be allowed to pay for it, her consent to the arrangement is taken for granted, and she has no choice but to go with the others to what seems to be a confectioner's shop turned into a restaurant.

Eleanor has no appetite, neither, for a wonder, has Jack Hughes, but Florry does full justice to the outlets and tomatoes, and is so busily engaged that she does not observe how silent as well as how indifferent to what is before them are her two companions.

At length Eleanor feels the silence grow irksome, and she asks, carelessly, and with assumed indifference,—

"Are you staying in Ipswich, Mr. Hughes?"

"I am here for the present," he replies, slightly colouring. "I came yesterday, and meant to go to London to-day, but this morning the weather was so fine that I was tempted to stay, and now I almost feel inclined to go back to Dovercourt."

"I don't know what will become of your friend, Mr. Rowe, if he is left to amuse himself," says Eleanor, with a smile. "Yesterday he was quite desolate; we kept him to luncheon with us in the hope of cheering him, but when Miss Trefusis arrived he went away, and I had quite forgotten him until I saw you on the parade."

"There is an unconscious flattery in this that Mr. Hughes recognises and takes unto himself, though he cannot help expending a slight amount of pity upon poor Rowe, who is only remembered and considered for his friend's sake.

"Yes; I don't think I have behaved fairly to poor Rowe," he says, with sudden self-reproach, "but I am an unreliable sort of fellow, and am apt to act rashly at times upon impulse."

"It was under one of those impulses that you saved my life, I suppose?" she says, looking at him with smiling timidity.

"No; there was no impulse in that," he answers, while his face changes, and becomes positively stern in expression. "I should have done what I did had you been my greatest enemy."

Her eyelids droop. She is too startled by this strange speech to be able to reply at once, and the silence that ensues would be painful if prolonged much longer.

Florry Trefusis has heard all that has passed, and she now makes a diversion by saying,—

"Nellie, do you see that man staring at you? Do you know him? He is wonderfully handsome."

Eleanor looks in the direction indicated, and her face becomes deadly pale, though she inclines her head ever so slightly; and the next instant the stranger, whose appearance has so startled her, rises from his seat and approaches the party.

"For Heaven's sake, don't leave us!" gasps Eleanor, turning to Hughes.

And before he can reply the tall Italian is at the side of the table, and tapping it lightly,

but imperiously, with his finger tips, he says in a voice too loud for such a place or occasion,—

"So, my lady fair, we meet again!"

Jack Hughes looks up with sudden anger, and his natural impulse is to spring to his feet and knock the man down, but with an effort he restrains himself, though the expression of his own face is anything but friendly; and he looks at Eleanor with such an inquiring gaze that she, having slightly recovered her self-possession, meets the eyes of the Italian calmly, and replies,—

"Yes, Count; it seems that we meet again."

Her calmness has its effect upon the stranger. He pulls himself together, tries to smile, and with more courtesy than he has hitherto shown he asks,—

"Will you not make me known to your friends?"

His straightforward question makes it impossible for her to do anything but introduce him as the Count di Talmio to her companions.

Mr. Hughes returns the salutation with all the stiff, unbending repulsion of an Englishman to an aggressive foreigner; but Florry Trefusis, who has felt sadly out in the cold while Eleanor and the young artist talked together, hails the addition to the party with unconcealed pleasure, and she moves her gloves and sunshade from the chair by her side so that the Count may join them.

Her gracious manner is not properly appreciated, even by the Count, as it should be, for he has no eyes for anyone but Eleanor; and he would scarcely notice her companions if it were not that instinct, with unerring certainty, has convinced him that he and Hughes are rivals.

He is an Italian of noble birth; tall, broad-shouldered, and he carries himself like a soldier, and like one born to command.

In addition to this he has all the fine points of a well-born, well-bred Italian.

His face is distinctly handsome; his large, long, brown-black eyes can flame with passion or melt with love; he has a fine, straight nose, a soft, silky, dark moustache, which is often tugged unmercifully; he has good teeth, rather voluptuous lips, a clean-shaven chin, and black, curling hair, cut rather close to his head.

When he smiles his countenance is very winning, and Florry Trefusis decides that she never saw a man so perfectly charming.

As for Mr. Hughes—according to Florry—he is but a senseless log in comparison; and in justification of her conclusion it may be remarked that he has not paid the least attention to herself.

"A beastly hole this is!" remarks the Count, looking about him critically, and speaking with unpleasant distinctness.

He has lived in England for several years; he can speak slang like a native, and his adjectives are often more forcible than well-chosen.

A waiter who is close at hand looks at him with strong disapproval; and Eleanor, who is nervously afraid of a scene, now rashly observes,—

"If you disapprove of the place so strongly I wonder you came to it."

"My dear creature, it was the first place I saw and I was hungry; besides, has it not brought me face to face with you once more?"

Eleanor, who has for the moment lost her dread of him, shrugs her shoulders, and with a disdainful smile, answers,—

"That is a very doubtful advantage. I suppose you are passing through Ipswich, signor?"

"I—I am a citizen of the world. I am passing anywhere, staying anywhere; and you, are you passing through Ipswich?" he asks, turning the tables upon her.

"We came to Ipswich to do some shopping, and it is time that we made a move," she says, turning to Mr. Hughes, as though she were making a suggestion that needed his consent.

(To be continued.)

FACETIÆ.

When a man falls down his temper generally gets up before he does.

A cheap dentist must be a man of low extraction.

"Charlotte little pink-tipped, shell-like ears you have, Miss Totty. Did you never have them pierced?" No; but I have had them bored."

The following epitaph may be seen in the cemetery of a parish in the environs of Paris: "Here lies Madame N—, wife of M. N—, master blacksmith. The railing around this tomb was manufactured by her husband."

An elderly gentleman is seen to tread on a piece of orange peel, and come heavily down on his back. Police stranger, raising his hat to him: "Excuse me, sir; would you mind doing that again? My friend didn't see it."

Professor: "We cannot taste in the dark. Nature intends us to see our food." Student: "How about a blind man's dinner?" Professor: "Nature has provided him with eye-teeth, sir."

"Ergo," remarked the professor to his class, after a long preamble. "Ergo"—then he stopped to take breath. "Well, let ergo," sung out one of the students, and the conclusion was ruined.

"Who," said a member of the House of Commons to the members who were trying to choke him off, "who brayed there?" "It was an echo," retorted a member, amid a yell of delight.

Judge (to witness with bandaged eye): "Did he have any provocation when he struck you?" Witness: "He may have had something of the kind concealed on his person, but it was a brick he struck me with."

MEDICAL DIRECTOR.—"How are you getting on?" asked Yeast of young Crimsonbeak, whom he met in the street the other day. "First rate," was the young man's reply. "What are you doing?" further queried Yeast. "I'm a medical director in an institution." "A medical director?" "Yes; you see I direct envelopes in a patent-medicine house." "Oh!"

STANDARDS.

A man lost few shame is no worse than a brute. A woman lost few shame is no better than a fiend.

The only way few convince a phool is to outtalk him.

Satire that is reasonable and just is often more effectual than law or gospel.

I don't suppose there has been over 80 secrets kept in just hands since the days of Adam.

Lazy men are always convicted knitters.

About the tightest spot a man can get into is where he can't blame enny body but himself.

He who has complete control at all times over his powers and his passions is a hard nut to crack.

A man's imagination is like a vine; if he don't set up a pole for it to twine on, it will run off into all sorts of twist and tangle.

The biggest hypocrites in the world are those who play lamb.

The eyes are the windows of the heart, and the ears are the windows of the brain.

If there wa'n't nothing but truth in the world we could get along with one-third of the language we use now.

A prudent man is one who trusts in God, and keeps his eye on the pot when it's boiling.

If there wa'n't no ignorance there would be no prejudice, for everything would be valued just according to its worth.

My young friend, you may give every man you meet the whole of the road if you have a mind to, but you must not expect to get enny credit for it.

JOSH BILLINGS.

Among the Zulus the mother-in-law cannot face the son-in-law, but must hide, or pretend to do so, whenever she sees him. In this country the custom is reversed; it is the son-in-law who does the dodging.

Gambler (in a cheap restaurant): "These boiled eggs are bad, I can't eat them. Call the proprietor." The proprietor arrives, and, after examining the eggs, turns upon the waiter: "Imbecile! he exclaims in rage, 'have you the stupidity to serve these eggs in the shell? They are rotten. When eggs are in that condition they are only fit for omelettes!'"

COL. FRIESTON was under the painful necessity of administering a severe chastisement to his son Johnnie. After he had completed his labours, he said sternly to the suffering victim: "Now tell me why I punished you?" "That's it," sobbed Johnnie, "you nearly pounded the life out of me, and now you don't even know why you did it!"

Professor: "How could anyone write such flat verses?" Popular Author: "I don't agree with you, sir; and I ought to say that the words are mine." Professor: "Oh, I beg your pardon! I mean they are so horribly bungled by the woman reading them. Who is she?" Popular Author: "She's my wife, sir."

NICK YOUNG MAN (lecturing to a Sunday-school): "Now is there any little boy or little girl who would like to ask any questions? Well, little boy, I see your hand; you needn't snap your fingers. What question would you like to ask?" Small Boy: "How much longer is this jawin' goin' to last?"

He (at the ball): "I'm going to propose, Miss Edith—" "She (interrupting): "Oh, my, Mr. Jenkins, so sudden and in such a strange place!" He (desperately): "I am going to propose that we stay here when the rest go to supper, because—because—I've left my purse at home."

Too MANY NAMES.—A little adventure of the Duke de Braganza, the husband of the Princess Amelia of Orleans, is related. "I was travelling in Spain," said the Duke, "and had reached a miserable little village. It was I am. Knocking at the only hostelry in the place, a gruff voice called out, 'Who's there?' 'Don Alphonse Ramire Juan Pedro Carlos Francisque Dominique de Roxas de Braganza.' 'Drive on,' was the reply; 'I can't accommodate so many people.'"

HE COULDN'T DO IT.—Gray: "And you claim that Black is a total abstainer?" Green: "Certainly he is." Gray: "Come now, doesn't he keep a drop in the house on the sly?" Green: "No, sir, not a drop! He couldn't do it without my knowledge." Gray: "Why not?" Green: "Because my coachman is courting his servant-maid, and neither of our families can keep the smallest secret from the other."

FURLONGING A BRAU.—He: "And are you sure, Sarah, you don't love me? I have been persistent, I know, but I wanted your love. Don't you think you'll miss me?" She: "I don't know. I see so much of you that I don't know whether I'd miss you or not. Give me a fair trial, and stay away a month, won't you?" He (bitterly): "A month! Might as well call it a year!" She: "Well, let's call it a year, then!"

CONJUGAL DEVOTION.—Not long ago, as an elderly couple were out walking, a lady on the other side of the street slipped and fell down. The old gentleman rushed across the street, raised his hat, and offered to assist her in any possible way. His wife followed him across at a slow pace, and witnessing his devotion to the stranger, shook her fist at him. "It's all right—it's all right!" he whispered. "Yes, I know it is!" she exclaimed, hotly. "Here an unknown woman hurts her toe, and you plough across the street to assist her up with kindness. The other day when I fell downstairs you stood and laughed, and wanted to know if I was practicing for a circus!"

ON A STRIKE.—A small boy, without any hat, with his hair like a hair patch, his clothes twisted wrong; end foremost, and bearing other marks of some great upheaval of nature, rushed out of a house and into the arms of a policeman. "Hello!" exclaimed that worthy. "What's the matter?" "Oh, nothing much," replied the boy; "only ma's been on a strike, that's all."

RUNNING NO RISKS.—"Now, Johnnie, go and kiss your little sweetheart and make it up," said his mother. "No'm, I won't." "Go and tell her how much you love her and how sorry you are." "No. Pa says he got into a breach of promise case by tellin' a girl that, and had to marry the old thing. I ain't runnin' no risks, I ain't."

HAPPY IN HIS DREAMS.—Fond Wife: "Did you have pleasant dreams last night, George?" Rude Husband: "Why do you ask?" Fond Wife: "Because I noticed a pleasant smile on your face as you slept." Rude Husband: "Yes; I forgot for the time that I was married. Pass the butter."

SHE TRUSTED HIM.—"Ma, haven't I been a real good boy ever since you whipped me the last time for telling a whopper?" "Yes, Billy; you have—a very good boy, indeed." "And you trust me now fully, don't you?" "Yes, my boy, fully." "Then, mamma, what makes you keep the preserve closet in the pantry locked all the time, just the same?"

APPROXIMATION.—Counsel (examining witness): "You say that you distinctly saw the shots fired?" "Yes, sir." "And how near were you to the scene of the affray?" "When the first shot was fired I was ten feet from the shooter." "Ten feet! Well, now, tell the court where you were when the second shot was fired." "I didn't measure." "Speaking approximately, how far should you say?" "Well, it approximated to half a mile."

"Well, you please give me some dinner, ma'am?" begged a tramp. "Yes," was the reply. "Will you have a plate of soup?" "I'm not particular," said the tramp. "There was a time," he went on, mournfully, "when I wouldn't think of sittin' down to dinner without soup; but things are different now. You kin start me on roast beef, or pie, or even an omelette, for all I care."

NOT MUCH MEAT.—Two fashionably dressed young ladies were walking down the street, one on either side of a young gentleman, who was extremely swell in attire and equally meagre in proportions. A street gamin grinned at them, then remarked, dryly, much to the discomfiture of the masher: "Ain't much ham in that sandwich."

A SENSIBLE YOUNG WIFE.

"How do you like my cooking? Come, now, give me your honest opinion. How does it compare with your mother's?"

"If you want my honest opinion, I will say your cooking is very fair, but it is not quite equal to mother's."

"I did not expect it would be quite equal to your mother's, but I wish you to remember that your mother had many years experience before you were capable of forming a judgment of her cooking."

"By Jove, you are right. I never would have thought of that, though I assure you I would have made no comments on your cooking if you had not asked for my honest opinion. The point you have made is a good one, but it is entirely overlooked by young married men."

"It is, and, unfortunately, it is not thought of by young wives. The idea of any man saying to a girl just a year or two out of school, 'You can't cook as well as mother,' or 'You don't manage as well as mother,' and never taking into consideration that mother has had an experience of forty or fifty years! Suppose the young wife should turn round and retort, 'You're not half as skillful a workman as my father!'"

"And I wonder she doesn't. It's a poor rule that won't work both ways."

And so it is, when you come to think of it.

SOCIETY.

THE Queen has, through her Commissioner at Balmoral, sent a letter to the editor of *Bon Accord*, a weekly paper published in Aberdeen, expressing Her Majesty's pleasure upon reading a homely little poem published in that paper entitled "She noddit to me," and desiring to know the name of the author. The poem describes a wayside incident during the Queen's journey to Balmoral.

PRINCESS LOUISE recently presided at a meeting at the "Colinderies," convened for the purpose of wishing God-speed to a party of teetotal emigrants on the eve of their setting sail for South Africa, where they propose establishing themselves under the name of the Wolsley Township in Kaffraria. The colonists number twenty-one families, and comprise ninety-one souls.

MANCHESTER'S idea, it is said, is to celebrate the Queen's jubilee by an exhibition, notwithstanding the fact that the public appetite for exhibitions must be pretty well appeased. The business is being overdone; one exposition is pretty well a reflex of another, as persons who have invested several successive shillings are beginning to find out. But for supplementary attractions many recent exhibitions would have been ghastly failures. Still, Manchester is big enough to know its own mind and business, and if it imagines that by organising a Jubilee Exhibition it can exhibit its loyalty and rake in profits at the same time, by all means let it make the experiment.

A PRETTY new French bonnet, *Modern Society* tells us, that the Princess of Wales has just received, and that may therefore be looked for in the Park, consists of black straw traversed by soft white mualin, and trimmed with forget-me-nots. The Duchess of Edinburgh recently ordered at the same Parisian house a capote rejoicing in the name of "*choux bbf*." It is quite small, the *choux*, or "cabbage," being made of blue ribbon with a daisy daintily set in the middle. The Grand Duchess Vladimir of Russia the other day selected a cork bonnet with little Scotch plaid ribbons, which in St. Petersburg will be regarded as exceedingly original.

THE Cairns-Grant marriage, which is to take place in July, is to be one of the events of the season. Mrs. Grant and her daughter Adele, who is engaged to be married to Earl Cairns, have arrived in London. Mrs. Grant has taken a house in Upper Grosvenor-street, where she will reside during the remainder of the London season. Miss Grant's trousseau, which is of the most lavish description in all its details, is almost completed. One of the bridegroom's presents will be a magnificent diamond necklace, with a ruby pendant. Earl Cairns's fiancée already tells the time, we believe, by a watch presented to her by him, the back of which is formed of a cat's-eye surrounded by diamonds.

MADAME ADELINA PATTI's long-talked-of marriage with Ernesto Nicolini has at last taken place. The bride, in pale blue *crêpe de chine* and duchesse lace, with a bonnet of the same, was accompanied by Mr. Augustus Spalding and Monsieur Magnard to the church, where she was met by M. Nicolini and those intimate friends who had been invited to be present on the occasion.

The large parish church of Ystradgynlais had been crowded since early morning with people, and had been decorated with green wreaths and masses of beautiful flowers. After the service the party returned to Craig-y-nos to discuss an excellent breakfast, and listen to several very apt and graceful speeches from Mr. Spalding, the rector, the consul, and others.

The Prince of Wales's was the very first felicitation Madame Patti received.

STATISTICS.

THE PROGRESS OF EDUCATION.—In the Board Schools the increase of average attendance in 1886 was 152,000 or 5.3 per cent. on the attendance of 1881. The increase in 1886 was only 87,000, or 2.6 per cent. This was, however, considerably over the increase anticipated from the natural increase of the population, which was 60,000 a year. In 1885 the estimated population of England and Wales was 27,499,041, the provision required for children in public schools being 4,583,173 seats. The excess of supply was 100,000 seats, which arose from there being a considerable excess in some districts and a deficiency in others. In London the increase was so large that it required a great effort to meet it, new schools for 12,000 children being needed every year. For every 100 children of school age who ought to be at school, public schools had provided ninety-one seats, but in these there were only eighty scholars on the register and only sixty-two in average daily attendance. This showed that much remained to be done by them. In 1878, two years after the passing of Mr. Forster's Act, the average attendance per hundred scholars was 66.8; in 1879, two years after Lord Sandon's Act, it was 69.95; in 1884, two years after Mr. Mundella's Act, it had increased to 75.46; and this year it had reached to 76.4. In this respect, compared with other countries, there was great reason for congratulation. In 1869, out of every hundred of the population only seven children were in attendance at school, but in the present year the number was 16.67, which compared favourably even with Germany.

GEMS.

THERE'S no little groove or moulding or fitting or finish, but is a bit of somebody's living, and life grows, going on. We've all got our pieces to do.

THE natural effect of fidelity, clemency, kindness, in governors, is peace, goodwill, order and esteem on the part of the governed.

THE sweetest of all pleasures, and one that will never decay, is to cherish the heart that loves you.

IF women lead men to the verge of a precipice, and the men throw themselves over, the men do a very wrong thing, but only, perhaps, what the women have cause to expect.

UNAFFECTED modesty is the sweetest charm of female excellence—the richest gem in the diadem of their honour.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

PLAIN CAKE.—Three-quarters pound of flour; the same of moist sugar; quarter pound of butter; one egg; two table-spoonfuls of milk. Mix all together and bake it.

RICE CAKES.—Eight eggs; half the whites; whip them swiftly for ten minutes; half pound ground rice; six ounces powdered sugar; the peel of one lemon grated. Whip all together half an hour with a whisk; butter the tin and bake twenty minutes. If a few caraway seeds are added this cake is strongly recommended for weak stomachs.

DAMSON JAM.—Bake the fruit sufficiently to enable you to separate the stones readily, then boil the fruit in the proportion of three-quarters of a pound of good moist sugar to a pint of fruit after the stones are removed.

BLACKBERRY JAM.—To every pound of berries add half a pound of coarse brown sugar, and boil the mass for three-quarters of an hour, or a little longer if the fruit was wet, stirring it well. Preserve it like any other jam, and it will be found most useful in families, particularly for children, regulating their bowels, and enabling you to dispense with physic.

MISCELLANEOUS.

IN counteracting the defects, we should be cautious not to blunder by imitation of others. We should search till we find where our character fails, and then amend it—not attempt to become another man.

OF the total number of dwellings in New York, 10,314 contain one family, or six persons; 18,932 houses or flats contain one family on a floor, or twenty-five persons; while 18,966 tenements accommodate fifty persons each on an average—that is, about three-quarters of a million.

SOMETIMES a hurry is the best thing. I am glad, says a writer, there are quicks and hurries. There always are two things. The world is all opposites; and one thing could not be without the other. You cannot rest until you are tired; you can't be glad if you've never been sorry. We shall find it all out by-and-by.

NO man can find the key of life by hunting for it; but he who goes steadily about life's true affairs, neither pausing to ask why, nor refusing to work because he is not told why—he already holds the key, and without knowing it unlocks, one by one, the secrets whose true solution is not in asking and hearing, but in being and doing. To such it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the soul.

OBSERVANT SILENCE.—When shall we find "observant silence" among the young? The young who observed and were silent have passed away—little John Ruskin being assuredly the last of the species—and their places are filled by those to whom observation and silence are unlike unknown. This is the children's age, and all things are subservient to their wishes. Masses of juvenile literature are published annually for their amusement; conversation is reduced steadily to their level while they are present; meals are arranged to suit their hours, and the dishes thereof to suit their palates; studies are made simpler and toys more elaborate with each succeeding year. The hardships they once suffered are now happily ended, the decorum once exacted is fading rapidly away. We accept the situation with philosophy, and only now and then, under the pressure of some new development, are startled into asking ourselves where it is likely to end.

BULL-FIGHTING IN MEXICO.—The bull-fighting of Zacatecas is said to be the best in the republic. Of course Betsy and I have been—not from any remnants of Mother Eve's curiosity lingering in our breasts, but as dutiful journalists are in duty bound to see all things. There are two plazas de torres here, one in town and the other in the adjoining village, Gaudalope. Both are new structures, built to stand the wear and tear of time, and capable of seating immense audiences. And the bulls are no sickly, half-starved shams like those of Saltillo, but bound, pawing and bellowing into the arena, magnificent specimens of strength and fury. In the course of one peaceful Sunday afternoon—when the January air was like our northern October, and we thought of church bills and Sabbath scenes at home—we had the pleasure (?) of seeing three horses disembowelled, five bulls killed, and one man disabled for life; and the beastly entertainment was not concluded when we left. Bull-fighting is regulated and protected by law here, and a detachment of soldiers is always in attendance to preserve order. The government orphan asylum furnishes a fine brass band for the national Sunday diversionment—boys from twelve to eighteen years of age, who are paid for their services by the manager of the bull-ring. "Gentle women" patronise the barbarous performance and apparently enjoy it.—*American Paper*.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

W. S. C.—No record of the lines quoted.

O. F. B.—1. Yes. 2. The word *Kismet* is Arabic, and means that which is fated.

FAIRY PET.—The Prince of Wales visited the United States in 1860.

DOLE.—"Acne" has many causes, the principal one being a derangement of the blood. It is curable, but requires patience.

FRANKTRUDE.—Wash carefully with soap and water, and then rub the parts which still remain solid with fine glass-paper or pumice-stone.

M. D.—It is a matter for a respectable medical man. Cold water baths and strengthening food, with the occasional use of a tonic, is all we can recommend in a general way.

NELLY.—The name of the late Prince Leopold Duke of Albany, making the number of the Queen's children nine, was inadvertently omitted from our list last week.

G. H. W.—The work of a copyist might suit you, but it would not bring you the remuneration you desire. We know of no other employment to suggest under the circumstances stated by you.

G. W.—The specimen you enclosed is a remarkably compact and pure asphalt. If found in large quantities it would be of value as an enricher of the soil used for making gas. Dyspepsia is due to so many causes that there can be no universal remedy. We would advise patients to use your remedy with a little caution. Three teaspoonfuls each day is a large dose.

T. C.—1. "Fits" means "son of." 2. The only animal hybrids of any importance, except mules, are the hybrid geese of India, which are a cross between the common and the Chinese geese, species so different as to have been placed in distinct genera. Hares and rabbits, wolves, dogs, and foxes are also said to breed freely among each other.

A. A. K.—At stones, such as we find embedded in softer material, have been formed by the breaking up of extensive masses. The fragments have then been worn and rounded by the action of the waves, and transported by ice or water to the situations in which we find them. Of course such stones lose instead of gaining weight in their travels, and once quietly buried, remain unchanged from year to year.

G. B.—It was so called by the Greeks. It is a figure brought into use by Praxiteles, the sculptor, to gratify the revengeful hate of the Greeks against Orya, a city in Arcadia. After the famous battle of Thermopylae the city sided with the Persians against the Greeks. The Greeks were victorious, and in their fury against Orya they burned the city, then the men made the women slaves. To perpetuate the disgrace a new figure was brought into architecture. Instead of a pillar, a female statue upheld entablatures.

B. V.—You had better restrain your high temper. Young men are rather afraid of marrying a girl with a high temper. Amiability has a great charm for all. Read your Bible and take heed. It is full of lessons to the proud and high-tempered. Avoid doing or saying anything requiring an apology. There is nothing more repulsive than an angry woman. You cannot hope to be loved and wooed until you have outgrown your petulance.

T. W. G.—Paisley is one of the most noted places in Scotland for the manufacture of various plaids; but we can find no such enumeration or description as you desire. The name of plaid applies to a pattern or colours which resemble a Scotch plaid; and any material checked or marked with bars or stripes at right angles to one another is called a plaid; as plaid white muslin, etc.

ETHEL.—Germans advertise a way of changing the colour of the eyes, but oculists say it is injurious to the sight. We have no doubt your eyes are a pretty, though, maybe, unusual colour, and correspond with your hair and complexion. Nature is a correct artist. Grey eyes dashed with green, with the cattish-yellow spark in the pupil, are not without admirers. Both Swinburne and Mrs. Browning have sung of their subtle fascination. Swinburne's Felice had cattish eyes, and so have many of Miss Broughton's heroines. By the way, the very same learned old German doctor who is said to have discovered how to change the colour of the eyes—ocular transmutation, he calls it—nothing like giving a thing a high-sounding name—this same doctor says that golden eyes and green-grey eyes are beautiful. So be comforted, Ethel, and don't go monkeying with your eyes.

BESSIE.—You should have kept quiet. And perhaps the reason why you cannot attract and hold the admiration you confess to be seeking so earnestly is just because you are too eager about it, too self-conscious—think and talk too much about yourself. Study how to correct such vanity. Extend your information, and take an amiable interest in other people, and in outside things. You cannot interest men for any length of time by a pretty face and silly airs and graces. People play with a kitten, but they tire of it as a companion. You ask why it is that persons of the opposite sex stare at you and inquire about you when you go to a strange town or neighbourhood. There is nothing so remarkable in this. There are plenty of idle and brainless youths in every town, and as long seems to be their lot to. As you are pretty, and, no doubt, look conscious of the fact, they feel privileged to stare and inquire.

ERMINE.—Strictly speaking the two husbands are not relations to each other. They can only call each other brother-in-law by courtesy.

R. F. I.—1. You must bide your time. It would be unadvisable to thrust your attentions upon the gentleman. 2. July 24, 1860, fell on Saturday.

LENA.—To carry on a florist's business on a large scale requires a good deal of capital, as well as a good deal of experience. So many people are engaged in selling flowers at watering-places during the fashionable season that it takes a person of energy and tact to make much at the business.

ROSE.—It is true, as a rule, that absence does weaken love, and so let him come to see you, even if you have to do the housekeeping and help with the cooking. If he is a true man and an honest lover he will not think less of you for that. You write quite nicely.

G. W.—Sometimes the word degree is used for generation, in which case the third degree means the same as the third generation. In that sense a grandchild would be in the third degree of relationship to its grandparents. In other cases the term degree is applied to the consanguinity of collateral relatives, such as cousins. In that sense third cousins are in the third degree of relationship.

G. G. H.—Study the portion of Descartes' "Natural Philosophy" devoted to Electricity, Roscoe's "Chemistry," and any good short school arithmetic. When you are grounded in the first principles of electricity, you will be in a position to take up any of the works relating to its modern applications.

LOVE IS THE BEST OF ALL.

This world may be a happy world
If each will do his part
To glid the bloom
And make it bloom
In nature and in art.

Full many a charming thing we find
To rob life of its thrill,
To give us peace
And sweet increase,
But love is the best of all.

This world may be a garden fair,
If each will add a flower,
Or pluck a weed,
Or plant a seed
That will bear rich fruit for dower.

If each will add a honey-drop
Unto some cup of gall,
Then love will grow,
And bud and blow,
And love is the best of all.

Aye! love will warm a strong man's heart,
And give a woman joy,
As they watch and wait
Early and late
For the gold without alloy.

True love will let the sunbeams in,
And every cloud forestall;
Will guide and bless
With tenderness—
So love is the best of all.

M. A. K.

W. W. F.—Lucile is a word of two syllables, the second rhyming with "soul." Hyperion has four syllables; it is pronounced as spelt, as a word of four syllables, with the accent on the first and third. *Ouire-Mer* is French; it is pronounced somewhat like "our mare." A list of Longfellow's works would fill ten or twelve lines in this column, and a list of Ruskin's as much. You can get both from the encyclopaedia or from a bookseller.

A. P. P.—Should your husband die without making a will, you will have your right of dower in all of the real estate he owned at the time of his death. If the notes you had against him were given to you in good faith, for money or property that belonged to your separate estate, so as to render them legal obligations against your husband, you can bequeath them in your will to your nephews and nieces, and they will be valid claims against your husband's estate.

W. G. H.—It would be a good plan to hold this young gentleman at a little distance, and when he complains repeat his remarks to him. They are not very polite or encouraging, and if they really express his true sentiments the sooner you are rid of such an admirer the better. Until he fairly proposes marriage we advise you not to trust him. There is many a true word spoken in jest, and sometimes the boldness of such an avowal of selfishness and indifference, as mentioned in your letter, blinds us to its truthfulness. You might read this to him.

E. F. F.—The hawfinch is found in the mountainous or elevated regions of Europe, and is an irregular visitant of Great Britain. It has a very large bill and head. The neck is short and thick, and the body and limbs are proportionally small. The head is yellowish brown, with the throat and space before the eyes black; fore part of back dark chestnut, the rest brownish grey; wings with purple gloss and white spots; tail black, tipped with white. The female resembles the male, but the colours are paler. Its song is pleasant, but plaintive. It feeds on the seeds of various trees, and is particularly fond of garden vegetables, especially green peas. Its nest is very elaborately constructed on the highest branches of trees. The young are hatched towards the end of May.

ANNIE.—No, no; compelled.

W. G. H.—Luther's famous hymn is the one beginning, "Ein feste Burg ist Unser Gott," which has been translated into the hymn, "A mighty fortress is our God."

J. T.—If you have given the quotation correctly, you certainly have caught Irving in a blunder. It would be well for you to examine the whole passage carefully to see if, after all, there is not some good reason for the way in which the accomplished author has expressed himself.

G. H.—The current reports of the Indian authorities put the number of persons annually killed in British India by poisonous reptiles and wild beasts at about twenty thousand. It is estimated that over two thousand persons are annually killed by tigers alone, and about the same number fall victims to the cobra, the most dreaded of the reptiles.

C. W. F.—You should talk the whole matter over with your parents and tell them just how you feel about it. You acted wisely in the first instance in refusing to enter into a marriage engagement without your parents' consent, and you should adhere to the same line of conduct with regard to your second offer of marriage. This will, of course, render it necessary for you to consult your parents. Your father is the proper person to direct the manner in which you should disengage yourself from your embarrassing situation.

A. A. R.—As a rule, a sufficiency of food, clothing and shelter is more conducive to health and longevity than the lack of them is. And in the main, physicians undoubtedly contribute to the health of mankind. Some people have such robust constitutions that they can stand all manner of hardships without apparent harm, and others are by nature so constituted as to fall at easy prey to disease. If the sick man whom you describe should have to undergo the hardships to which the tough old man has been subjected, the probability is that they would kill him in a week.

C. L.—As a remedy for your "very red skin" abstain from stimulating drinks and spiced food and try the Spanish lotion recommended by Lola Montes. It is sifted wheat bran infused in white wine vinegar for four hours. Then add to it the yolks of five eggs. Distil it and cork it for twelve hours. It is then fit to use in bathing the skin, to which it will give, as alleged, a "polished whiteness."

E. G. R.—1. By the holy family is meant the child Jesus, his mother, and foster-father, who after the birth of the Saviour in a stable were enabled to obtain a suitable dwelling. They subsequently fled to Egypt; an angel in the night having informed Joseph of the murderous design of Herod upon the life of Jesus, then, among strangers, did the Saviour of the world condescend to pass the first years of his earthly life. After the death of Herod the holy family took up their residence at Nazareth. 2. No knowledge of the picture referred to.

M. O.—The stethoscope was invented by Laennec, of Paris. By rolling a quire of paper into a kind of cylinder, and applying one end to the patient's chest and the other to his own ear, he perceived the action of the heart in a much more distinct manner than by the immediate application of the ear. This led to his construction of a more elaborate instrument, and the art of auscultation (from *auscultare* to listen), has since then made rapid progress. It is of comparatively recent date.

B. C. S.—Impaired digestion, irregular hours for eating, and badly cooked food often help to create the thirst for a stimulant. Give your husband good regular meals, breakfast, noon bread and office, get him to eat and sleep at regular times, keep from fretting him as much as possible, and only talk to him about his dissipation at proper times, and in a loving, earnest way. By this plan we have known more than one wife help her husband to break the chains of appetite. You have a better chance, as the habit in your husband is not confirmed.

W. M.—Milton, in "Paradise Lost," has said about as beautiful a thing of the moon as occurs in the English language. In speaking of the coming on of night he says:

"Now glowed the firmament
With living sapphires; Hesperus, that led
The starry host, rode brightest, till the moon,
Rising in clouded majesty, at length
Apparent queen unveiled her peerless light,
And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw."

LAY.—There is no remedy for the young lady's bad temper except experience. She will have to learn the evil of it as she goes on in life, and change it by degrees. See also answer to B. V.

THE LONDON READER, Post-free. Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly One Shilling and Eightpence.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS and VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 239, Now Ready, price Sixpence, post-free, Eightpence. Also Vol. XLVI., bound in cloth 4s. 6d.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 334, Strand, W.C.

†† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 334, Strand, by J. R. Spock; and Printed by Woodfall and Kinder Milford Lane, Strand.